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Civic body finalises 3 names to rename Ghaziabad

GHAZIABAD, 10 JAN

Adding to the sequence of name changes in Uttar Pradesh since the Yogi government took shape, a proposal to change the name of the Ghaziabad district was passed with a majority by the municipal corporation on Tuesday.According to sources, two members of the corporation voted against the motion to rename Ghaziabad. During the meeting, three names -- Gaj Prastha, Doodheshwar Nath Nagar or Harnandipuram -- were finalised, which would now be sent to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.Speaking on the development, Ghaziabad Mayor Sunita Dayal said a lot of people have been demanding a name change for the district."A proposal will be sent to the Chief Minsiter after the discussion with the board. The final decision on the name change rests with the CM," the Mayor said. ***—ANI***

Man dies of cardiac arrest while playing cricket in Noida

NOIDA, 10 JAN

A 36-year-old engineer died after he suddenly collapsed of a cardiac arrest while playing cricket in a ground, police officials said on Wednesday.A video of the purported incident, which took place during the T20 cricket match at a ground in Sector 135 on Sunday, also surfaced on social media that showed the man, identified as Vikas Negi, collapsing on the pitch.Negi was one of the batters who were at the pitch and once he collapsed, opponents, the umpire and others rushed to him, some even tried giving him CPR before he was taken to a private hospital in a car."Vikas Negi was declared dead by doctors in the hospital. The post mortem showed cardiac arrest as the cause of the death. He was 36-year-old and worked as an engineer in a private firm here," Sarita Malik, the in-charge of the local Expressway police station said.Negi had scored seven runs off six balls. He was playing for Mavericks XI in the game against Blazing Bulls in a local T20 tournament. ***—PTI***

Speaker dubs Shinde faction 'real Sena', Uddhav fumes

The Speaker also rejected Sena (UBT) pleas to disqualify 16 Sena MLAs

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Wednesday held that the Shiv Sena faction led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, was the "real political party" when rival groups emerged in June 2022.

In his 105-minute long reading of the key points of the ruling, Rahul Narwekar also rejected Uddhav Thackeray faction's petition to disqualify 16 Shiv Sena MLAs including Shinde.

As Narwekar finished reading the order, celebrations broke out among Chief Minister Shinde's supporters, who burst firecrackers, while Sena (UBT) leaders Uddhav Sanjay Raut and Aaditya Thackeray said their party will approach Supreme Court against Speaker's order.

NCP leader Sharad Pawar said Uddhav will have to approach the apex court against the ruling of Speaker, who gave precedence to the legislature party.

Narwekar said no party leadership can use provision of 10th schedule of Constitution for dissent or indiscipline within party.

Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) MLA Bharat Gogawale celebrates with party leaders after the MLA disqualification case verdict, at Balasaheb Bhavan in Mumbai, Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

In his order on disqualification petitions filed by Shinde-led Sena and the rival faction led by Uddhav against each other's MLAs, Narwekar said Sunil Prabhu of the Sena (UBT) ceased to be the whip from 21 June, 2022, and Bharat Gogawale of the Shinde group became the authorised whip.

The Speaker also held that the Shiv Sena pramukh' (chief) did not have the power to remove any leader from the party. He also did not accept the argument that the will of the party chief and the will of the party were synonymous.

The 1999 party constitution submitted to Election Commission was the valid constitution for deciding the issues, and the Thackeray group's contention that the amended constitution of 2018 should be relied on was not acceptable, he added.

The 1999 constitution made the 'Rashtriya Karyakarini' (national executive) the supreme body, he said.

The Shinde group had an overwhelming majority of 37 out of 54 MLAs when the rival factions emerged in June 2022, Narwekar said.

After the rebellion in June 2022, Shinde went on to become the Chief Minister with the BJP's support. On 11 May last year, Supreme Court ruled that Shinde would continue to be the Chief Minister of Maharashtra while stating that it could not reinstate the earlier Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition government headed by Uddhav Thackeray as the latter chose to resign without facing a floor test in the wake of Shinde's rebellion.

> **The foundation on which the order stands is wrong. This is a murder of democracy and an insult to Supreme Court. The apex court had given clear guidelines, but those were ignored by the Speaker while giving his ruling**
>
> -Uddhav Thackeray, Sena (UBT) Chief

However, the apex court had questioned then Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's action of calling for a floor test in order to solve an intra-party dispute. Election Commission gave the Shiv Sena' name and bow and arrow' symbol to the Shinde-led faction, while naming the group headed by Thackeray as Shiv Sena (UBT) with its symbol being a flaming torch. Assembly polls in Maharashtra are due in 2024. *—PTI*

'USING RAM FOR POLLS'

Kharge, Sonia say no to 'BJP & RSS' Ram Temple event

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Wednesday "respectfully declined" the invitation to attend the Ram Temple consecration ceremony with the party accusing BJP and the RSS of making it into a "political project" for electoral gain.

The decision of the top leaders was announced by Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, who also questioned the motive behind the inauguration of the "incomplete" temple by the leaders of the BJP and the RSS.

Last month, Congress chief and leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Kharge, Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Gandhi and Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Chowdhury received the invitation to attend the inauguration ceremony of the Ram temple at Ayodhya to be held on 22 January, 2024.

"Lord Ram is worshipped by millions in our country. Religion is a personal matter. But the RSS/BJP have long made a political project of the temple in Ayodhya. The inauguration of the incomplete temple by the leaders of BJP and RSS has been obviously brought forward for electoral gain," Ramesh said in a statement.

"While abiding by the 2019 Supreme Court judgment and honouring the sentiments of millions who revere Lord Ram, Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury have respectfully declined the invitation to what is clearly an RSS/BJP event," the Congress general secretary in-charge communications said. The consecration ceremony will be held on 22 January and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and more than 6,000 people are expected to attend it. BJP and RSS and affiliate Hindutva organisations like the Vishva Hindu Parishad have launched a nationwide mass connect programme in the run-up to the ceremony, urging people to visit the holy place after the programme. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Manipur okays venue for Cong's Nyay Yatra

IMPHAL, 10 JAN

The Manipur government Wednesday approved the venue for the flagging off of the proposed 14 January Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra "with limited number of participants."

The approval by the Manipur government came eight days after the Congress approached it for flagging off the yatra from Hapta Kangjeibung ground here. The order issued by the Imphal East district magistrate's office said, "Only flagging off of the Yatra with limited number of participants is hereby allowed on 14 January to prevent any untoward incident and disturbance in law and order. The number and name of the participants shall be provided in advance to this office to enable this office to take up all necessary precautionary measures".

The order said that the Imphal East district superintendent of police has submitted a report stating that a huge crowd is expected during the opening ceremony of Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra at the venue. In view of prevailing law and order situation in the state, the huge gathering may create law and order problems.

"Moreover prohibiton under Section 144 Cr PC is also in force in Imphal East district," it added. The prohibitory order has been in force in the area since the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur broke out on 3 May. The violence has claimed about 185 lives and left hundreds injured.

The order also said that the joint secretary of the home department has conveyed that agencies concerned have mentioned in their report that the matter is sensitive and needs special attention. *—PTI*

Raphael Thattil ***PHOTO: KCBC***

RAPHAEL THATTIL IS NOW SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH'S HEAD

KOCHI, 10 JAN

Bishop Raphael Thattil of Shamshabad diocese has been elected as the head of the influential Syro-Malabar Church, the largest Eastern Catholic Church after the Ukrainian Church.

On Wednesday, the church announced that the new Major Archbishop of the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese of the Syro-Malabar Church was elected during the Synod meeting held at Saint Thomas Mount in Kakkanad, near here. Thattil succeeds Cardinal Mar George Alenchery. *—PTI*

World looks at India as growth engine: PM

GANDHINAGAR, 10 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said India has emerged as a new ray of hope amid many uncertainties being faced globally, and the world looks at it as an important pillar of stability, a trusted friend and an engine of growth in the global economy.

He also said that in the rapidly changing world order, India is moving forward as 'vishwa mitra' (friend of the world).

Speaking at the inauguration of the 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, which saw participation of state heads and CEOs of top private companies, Modi said all major rating agencies are of the opinion that India will be among the three largest economies of the world in the next few years.

"In the rapidly changing world order, India is going ahead as vishwa mitra. India has given hope to the world that we can decide on common goals and achieve them. India's commitment to world welfare, its dedication, efforts and hard work are making today's world more secure and prosperous," he said. "Today, the world looks at India as an important pillar of stability, a friend who can be trusted, a partner who believes in people-centric development, a voice that believes in global good, a voice of global south, an engine of growth in the global economy, a technology hub for finding solutions a powerhouse of talented youth, and a democracy that delivers," he added. India's commitment to world welfare, India's loyalty, efforts and hard work are making today's world more secure and prosperous, he said.

Narendra Modi greets Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Fiala during Vibrant Gujarat Summit on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

"India's priorities are clear. India's priorities are sustainable industry, infrastructure and manufacturing, new age skills, futuristic technology, AI and innovation, green hydrogen, renewable energy, semiconductors and its entire ecosystem," he said.

Modi credited UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, who attended the summit as the chief guest, for the high growth of India-UAE relations.

Adani to invest Rs 2 lakh cr in Gujarat

Billionaire Gautam Adani on Wednesday announced an investment of over Rs 2 lakh crore in Gujarat, largely in building a green energy park that would be visible even from space.

Speaking at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit here, he said the investment will create 1 lakh jobs.

Of the Rs 55,000 crore committed at the last summit, Adani Group has already spent Rs 50,000 crore, he said. The apples-to-airport group is now building a green energy park in Kutch having a 30 GW capacity spread over 25 square kilometre which would also be visible from space, he added. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3 and 7

SC upholds Ajay Mishra's acquittal in murder case

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Supreme Court has upheld an order of the Allahabad High Court that dismissed an appeal filed by the Uttar Pradesh government in 2004 against Union minister Ajay Mishra's acquittal in a murder case.

The case pertains to the killing of Prabhat Gupta in Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh in 2000.

A top court bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said it was not inclined to interfere with the concurrent findings of facts recorded by the Lucknow bench of the high court and the trial court.

"Having heard the senior counsel, Kapil Sibal, appearing for the petitioner, at length and after carefully perusing the material placed on record, we are not inclined to interfere with the concurrent findings of facts recorded by the two courts. Hence, the special leave petitions are dismissed," the bench said in its order passed on 8 January.

The trial court had acquitted Mishra in the case in 2004, after which the state government challenged the decision in the high court.

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by petitioner Rajeev Gupta, challenging the May 2023 high court order that had said there was no error in the trial court's judgment.

Earlier, the Union minister had moved the apex court seeking a transfer of the appeal from the Lucknow bench of the high court to the principal bench at Prayagraj, which was declined. *—PTI*

WOMEN MUST WEAR SARIS, SALWAR

No shorts & torn jeans in B'luru temples

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

The temple managements in Bengaluru are implementing a dress code from Wednesday and will allow devotees to enter temples only in Indian traditional attire.

Now, women wearing shorts, miniskirts, torn jeans; and men in shorts, torn jeans, and t-shirts with exposed chests will not be allowed to enter temples. Hindutva outfits Karnataka Devasthana Mahasangha and Hindu Janajagruta Samiti put up boards in front of temples and ordered strict adherence to the dress code from Wednesday.

A Temple Trustee of Jalahalli Sri Ayyappan Temple told Salar News, "As Indians, we should uphold our culture, especially within the confines of a holy place like the temple. Citizens should maintain decorum by wearing appropriate attire. We will restrict individuals who don't wear appropriate attires to temple. Fashionable dresses should be worn to malls not permitted within the temple premises." Meanwhile, the Sree Ayyappan Temple at Dodda Banaswadi Main Road near Maruti Sevanagar is not allowing men with lungis and jeans to enter the temple too. It has also asked women to dress to not wear maxis and night dress.

Hindutva outfits Karnataka Devasthana Mahasangha and Hindu Janajagruta Samiti put up boards in front of temples ***PHOTO: IANS***

- The temples have asked men to only wear shirts and trousers, dhotis and pyjamas. The preferred dress code for women is just limited to saris or half-saris and chudidhar with pyjamas. These rules will also be applicable for foreigners visiting the temple

The temples have asked men to only wear shirts and trousers, dhotis and pyjamas. The preferred dress code for women is just limited to saris or half-saris and chudidhar with pyjamas. These rules will also be applicable for foreigners visiting the temple

Karnataka Temples-Mutts and Religious Institutions Association had convened the meeting of priests and trustees of all temples last month and decided to implement the rule in January.

An appeal was made earlier and Hindu organisations supported the decision. A dress code campaign for temples will also be launched by installing a board in this regard in front of the Sri Laxmi Venkataramana temple in Vasanth Nagar in Bengaluru. *—Salar News with Agencies*

Maldives, China sign 20 pacts amid India row

BEIJING, 10 JAN

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday held in-depth talks with his Maldivian counterpart Mohamed Muizzu following which the two countries signed 20 "key" agreements, including one on tourism cooperation, and announced the elevation of their bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.

Muizzu said he was honoured to pay his first state visit to China and become the first foreign head of state that China has hosted this year, fully demonstrating the great importance both sides attach to the development of bilateral relations.

Xi stressed that China respects and supports the Maldives in exploring a development path suited to its national conditions.

"20 key agreements were signed today between the Government of the Maldives and the Government of China this afternoon and both the Presidents witnessed the signing ceremony," Maldivian President's office said in a post on X.

The agreements signed included tourism cooperation, disaster risk reduction, blue economy and strengthening investment in the digital economy. China will also provide grant assistance to the Maldives, but the amount was not disclosed. The agreements also included jointly accelerating the formulation of the Cooperation Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, social housing project on Fushidhiggaru Falhu, fisheries products processing factories and the re-development of Male' and Villimale' Roads Development Projects.

His appeal for more Chinese tourists came amid a diplomatic row with India. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: X

Mysuru police to install 250 CCTV cameras

MYSURU, 10 JAN

In a bid to address the rising concerns related to crime and road accidents, Mysuru City Police is planning to deploy 250 new high-tech closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras across densely populated areas, highways and major roads in the city. Currently, 108 CCTV cameras are already operational in the City. The State government accepted the proposal of City Police Commissioner and approved a grant of Rs 4.3 crore for renovating the surveillance system. Major highways connecting Mysuru, including Mysuru-Bengaluru Road, Hunsur Road, Mahadevpur Road, Narseepur Road, Bannur Road, Nanjangudu Road, and Manandwadi Road, will be equipped with special surveillance cameras. These cameras, estimated to cost a total of around Rs 1.16 crore, are designed to detect traffic violations such as speeding and signal jumping on the highways, allowing law enforcement to penalise offenders effectively. City Police Commissioner Ramesh Banoth said the new CCTV cameras will help in crime detection and traffic violation monitoring. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Couple tries to kill themselves in front of Vidhana Soudha

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

A family from JJR Nagar here tried to commit suicide by pouring kerosene in the forefront of Vidhana Soudha on Wednesday morning as their house was auctioned by the bank. Shahista Banu and Mohammad Munaid Ullah said their house estimated at Rs 3 crore was auctioned by the bank for only Rs 1.41 crore. They claimed they had been visiting the house of Housing, Wakf and Minority Welfare Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan for the last two years and that he did not help them. The couple had borrowed a Rs 50 lakh loan from Bangalore Cooperative Bank for growing ginger in 2016. The couple said they had paid Rs 90 lakh, including interest, to the bank. They requested minister Khan to order the bank to reduce the interest. Vidhana Soudha Police Inspector Kumaraswamy stopped the couple and filed an FIR under IPC Sections 309 and 290 against them. The couple were released on station bail. *—Salar News*

M'luru police arrests history-sheeter after shooting him in leg

MANGALURU, 10 JAN

Police here have arrested a notorious history-sheeter after shooting him in the leg while he was trying to escape after attacking a head constable. The accused Rohidas alias Akash Bhavan Sharan, 37,) tried to escape after allegedly assaulting head constable Prakash on Tuesday following which City Crime Branch Sub-Inspector Sudeep opened fire. City Police Commissioner Anupam Agarwal said the police were monitoring Sharan's movements for the last two weeks. He is an accused in around 25 cases including murder and sexual assault, registered in several police stations in and around the city, Agarwal added. A team led by Sudeep had tried to arrest him three days ago, but he escaped after trying to run his vehicle over the police personnel. A case in this connection was registered at Kavoor police station. *—PTI*

Cong shedding crocodile tears over R-Day parade: BJP

Vijayendra said Centre doesn't have any spite towards Karnataka

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) State President and MLA BY Vijayendra said Centre doesn't have any spite towards Karnataka and State's tableau was denied the opportunity to be paraded in Republic Day Parade in Delhi to provide a chance to other states. He accused the Congress government of shedding crocodile tears on this matter.

The State BJP held a meeting on Wednesday to strategise the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. On Tuesday, the Central government denied the State an opportunity to represent its tableau on Republic Day 2024 parade in New Delhi.

"Karnataka was given an opportunity at Republic Day parade for 14 consecutive years. This year, along with Karnataka, many other states were not given the opportunity; it is in goodwill to give the opportunities to others.

The State has been allowed to participate in the exhibition," he said.

Last year when Karnataka's tableau proposal initially did not get permission, the then BJP government "rushed" to Delhi, made a request and ensured that the State got the chance.

"But this time the State government did not choose to do that. Immediately when they got the information that Karnataka is not getting the opportunity, instead of making it a political issue, they should have approached the Central government," the Shikaripura MLA said.

Siddaramaiah said on Tuesday the Central government has insulted seven crore Kannadigas by denying an opportunity for the state's tableau at the Republic Day parade on 26 January.

According to the Chief Minister, several tableau proposals were sent from Karnataka, but unfortunately, the Central Government has rejected all of them.

About pro-Kannada activist Narayan Gowda's arrest, Vijayendra said, "The State is watching the government's move on Narayana Gowda. The government should honestly stand with the people in all the matters."

Narayana Gowda, Karnataka Rakshana Vedike, President was released on Monday from judicial custody but the police booked him in another case and arrested him on Tuesday.

He attacked the government for letting the Cauvery water flow to Tamil Nadu for the past six months and demanded a firm decision on the matter. *—Salar News*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the Centre has insulted seven crore Kannadigas but BJP State President BY Vijayendra hit back *PHOTO: PTI*

MURDER PRE-PLANNED

Suchana Seth was reportedly upset with the ongoing divorce proceedings with her husband *PHOTO: X*

Child allegedly killed by CEO mom cremated

BENGALURU/PANAJI, 10 JAN

The four-year-old boy allegedly killed by his mother, CEO of a Bengaluru-based artificial intelligence (AI) startup, was cremated in Bengaluru on Wednesday as it emerged in investigations by Goa police that it may have been a pre-planned murder.

A teary-eyed Venkat Raman, the estranged husband of the 39-year-old Suchana Seth, hailing from West Bengal, performed the last rites at Harishchandra Ghat at Rajaji Nagar here.

Seth, who was reportedly upset with the ongoing divorce proceedings with her husband, allegedly killed her son in the apartment at Candolim in Goa and stuffed the body in a bag before taking it to neighbouring Karnataka in a taxi, police said.

Meanwhile, Goa police have found two empty bottles of cough syrup in a room where the CEO of Mindful AI allegedly killed the boy, indicating she might have given a heavy dose of the medicine to him and that it was pre-planned murder, an official said. The post-mortem has revealed the child was smothered to death either with a cloth or a pillow, according to officials.

"He was strangled to death or what we call smothering. Either a cloth or a pillow was used. The child died due to strangulation. It doesn't look like the child was strangulated using hands," Hiriyur Taluk Hospital's administrative officer Dr Kumar Naik said.

Enquiries with the service apartment staff revealed the woman had asked them to buy a small bottle of cough syrup claiming she was having a cough, he said, adding the bigger bottle might have been carried by her.

According to police sources, the accused has denied her involvement in the crime during the interrogation and claimed the child was already dead when she got up from sleep. "We don't buy her theory. Further investigation will reveal the motive behind killing the child. As of now, we know that she and her husband were estranged because of which she might have done this," a senior police official said.

The child's father, Venkat Raman, who hails from Kerala but is now based in Indonesia, reached Hiriyur in Chitradurga district on Tuesday night and took possession of his son's body after the post-mortem. *—PTI*

SC group enters temple, Valmikis build a new one

MYSURU, 10 JAN

The Valmiki Nayaka community (Schedule Tribe) in Kenchalagudu village of Mysuru Taluk built a new temple after the people of Adi Karnataka community (Schedule Caste) entered the Lakshminarayanaswamy shrine. This has brought to light the ugly face of untouchability that still plagues our society.

Around 120 families reside in Kenchalagudu village which houses three temples managed by the Muzrai Department. People from Valmiki and Arasu (OBC) communities were allowed to participate in pooja rituals but the Adi Karntakas were barred from the same.

PHOTO: X

The Adi Karnataka people who are also Dalits filed complaints after which they were allowed to enter the temples on 2 December. *—Salar News*

NEED ACTION!

Bangalore University students want the government to release the Justice H Kantharaj Commission's Caste Census during their protest at the campus in Bengaluru on Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

14-year-old girl gives birth to baby, POSCO case filed

BAGEPALLI, 10 JAN

A 14-year-old who lived in a government girl's pre-metric hostel in Madhugiri, Tumakuru, was hospitalised after she complained of severe stomach pain. Later, the class nine student from Madhugiri Government High School gave birth to a baby boy on Tuesday following which the Bagepalli police registered a POSCO case. However, the accused is still at large. The victim has not revealed the accused's identity and is reportedly in a delicate condition. However, the warden of the hostel Niveditha has been suspended. Niveditha has allegedly remained suspiciously tight-lipped about the situation. The girl had joined the hostel last year and was studying well, said Shivanna, Taluk Social Welfare Officer. The girl was aware of the pregnancy and was using a pain relief belt to hide it. Even doctors failed to notice her pregnancy initially and just gave her painkiller injections. Bagepalli Taluk Medical officer said that both the mother and child are physically fine and the baby is kept at NICU in Chikkaballapur Government Hospital. *—Salar News*

Govt to form panels on poll guarantees: Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Congress government in Karnataka will constitute committees at State, district and constituency levels to supervise the implementation of the five guarantees promised by the party during 2023 Assembly polls, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Wednesday.

Those heading the panels will get an honorarium, Siddaramaiah said after a party meeting held here to chalk out the strategies for Lok Sabha 2024 elections.

The committee will address key issues related to poll guarantees such as Anna Bhagya scheme, Yuva Nidhi, Gruha Lakshmi and Shakthi (free travel). Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said: "Workers, non-MLAs and non-MPs will get committee membership and the party also plans to conduct a 'Mane Manege Congress' campaign to connect with voters."

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, DyCM DK Shivakumar, with others during Congress Leaders Meet for Lok Sabha elections at KPCC Party office in Bengaluru on Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

DCM calls upon party men to work unitedly

Shivakumar asked the Congress party workers to fulfil the expectations of the State government and work unitedly for Lok Sabha elections.

CM slams Opposition party

Siddaramiah lashed out at Opposition party on the financial mismanagement by the Bharatiya Janata Party during their tenure.

"Irrigation Department alone has pending bills exceeding Rs 13,000 crore. Other departments, including Public Works, Minor Irrigation and Rural Development, and Bengaluru City, face substantial financial burdens to the tune of more than Rs 40,000 crore in bills," he said. *—Salar News*

'BJP to formulate separate strategies for each LS seat'

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has decided to formulate separate strategies for each Lok Sabha constituency in this year's elections, said Bengaluru North MP DV Sadananda Gowda on Wednesday.

A preparatory meeting for Lok Sabha Elections 2024 was held under the leadership of BJP State President BY VIjayendra. "This meeting will give us strength. The meeting has laid the foundation for the operations, thinking and plans for Lok Sabha elections," Gowda said.

He said that the State President will call a meeting at the district level as well. "The members will instruct their district and mandal workers about all the matters discussed in the meeting. New responsibilities will be given to all the lower-level and booth-level workers," Gowda said.

Sadananda Gowda *PHOTO: X*

Congress is insane

About Congress boycotting the inauguration of the Ram Mandir because it was a political function, he said, "There is a limit to madness" and they have passed the height of insanity.

"Everyone knows that they filed an affidavit against the construction of the temple when the case was going on in the Supreme Court. They said Ram Setu was built by an engineer and not Lord Ram. It is known that only crazy people talk about crazy things," Gowda said. *—Salar News*

Led by Indian Farmers' Union, hundreds of farmers raised slogans against Bhadra panel officials in Davangere on Wednesday *PHOTO: SALAR*

SIDE-EFFECTS OF DROUGHT

KR Market faces a dip in sugarcane arrival

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

As City prepares to celebrate Makara Sankranti on 14 January, Bengaluru's KR Market, which is a hub for the sugarcane business, has been facing a notable reduction in the quantity arriving this season.

The KR Market, on average, receives about 50 truckloads of sugarcane every season between January and February. But this time, only 20 truckloads arrived because of the drought in State, recording a 60% reduction in arrivals.

Kurubur Shanthakumar, President of Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers, told Salar News, "Due to the drought, Karnataka witnessed a 40% reduction in sugarcane production. In 2022, the State produced 6.40 crore tons of sugarcane, whereas last year's production plummeted to about 4.40 crore tons, disrupting the livelihood of farmers." Sugarcane is harvested between November and December and transported to markets between January and February. Sugarcane comes to KR Market from Shivamogga, Channapatna in Ramanagara district, Hoskote, and occasionally from Hyderabad.

Asif Pasha, the owner of Abdul Jaleel Sab Sugarcane Mandi situated in the old market near Mysuru Road, is the main dealer of sugarcane in the market. "This time, we received only 20 loads after investing about Rs 6 lakh, due to the prevailing drought. However, last year, we made a profit of Rs 75 lakh from 50 loads," Pashsa told Salar News.

PHOTO: X

Flower prices increase

Meanwhile, as Makara Sankranti/Pongal is approaching, the price of the flowers has soared at KR Market. The flowers commonly used during the celebrations are roses, jasmines and marigolds.

The most popular pick of the season, the jasmine flowers have a market price ranging from Rs 600 to Rs 800 for 1kg, and are now being sold for Rs 800 to Rs 1000 per kilogram a few days before the festival

Imran Khan, a florist in KR Market said that the flower prices will further be increased by "Rs 60 on the day of the festival". The small roses and marigold flowers that are sold at Rs 80 currently will be sold for Rs 140 per kilogram.

"Last year, the prices of the roses that are usually sold for Rs 80 hiked up to Rs 240 due to the high demand of the festival." *—Salar News*

'LET CONG TALK ABOUT STATE'S GROWTH THAN SECULARISM'

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister should first give an answer regarding the development that has come to a standstill in State before deciding if Janata Dal is secular or not, said former JD(S) youth wing president Nikhil Kumaraswamy on Wednesday.

Hitting out at Congress's accusation that JD(S) is not a secular party, HD Kumaraswamy said it is not a question of secularism. "Kannadigas are suffering in Karnataka. Development is completely stunted," the JD (S) leader said. *—Salar News*

Farmers block roads in Davangere

DAVANGERE, 10 JAN

The farmers of Davangere blocked roads on Wednesday, protesting against the cancellation of the resolution of Bhadra Irrigation Advisory Committee meeting and the announcement of a new water release schedule. Led by Indian Farmers' Union, hundreds of farmers shouted at Bhadra panel officials during the protest, causing traffic jams and chaos.

The farmers' agitation stemmed from the decision of Superintendent Engineer Sujata, who announced the revised schedule for Bhadra Reservoir.

The protesters gathered near the Assistant Commissioner AC office and submitted a request. Farmer leader Kolenahalli Satish said, "They change the water schedule as they wish."

Under the new schedule, the Bhadravati-Tarikere section on the left bank was initially set to be irrigated for 16 days from 10 January, followed by a 15-day break, totalling 70 days. However, the revised schedule altered the water release for the Malebennur division, reducing it to 12 days from 15 January, with a 20-day stoppage, summing up to 53 days.

Satish said, "If water is released for only 12 days to the right bank, it won't reach the lands of the Davangere-Malebennur area." *—Salar News*

13 held for attacking BJP MLA's vehicle

MEDININAGAR, 10 JAN

At least 13 people were arrested in connection with the alleged attack on the vehicle of BJP legislator Pushpa Devi in Jharkhand's Palamu district, a police officer said on Wednesday.An FIR against 40 persons in connection with the case has already been filed in Chhatarpur police station, he said.The vehicle, in which Devi and her husband Manoj Kumar Bhuiyan were travelling, was allegedly attacked by commercial vehicle drivers, who had blocked the four-lane road at Udaigarh on Tuesday in protest against the recent legislation concerning hit-and-run incidents. Bhuiyan lodged an FIR in this regard and alleged that agitators pelted stones on their vehicle in which two security guards were injured.Chhatarpur sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Ajay Kumar told PTI that named FIR has been lodged against 40 people in this connection. *—PTI*

Rajasthan govt transfers 40 IAS officers

JAIPUR, 10 JAN

In a major administrative reshuffle, the Rajasthan government on Wednesday transferred 40 IAS officers. According to an order of the Department of Personnel, Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Akhil Arora will continue to head finance and excise department, and Anand Kumar on Home, Jail and Anti-Corruption Bureau. ACS Kuldeep Ranka, who was secretary to Former CM Ashok Gehlot and put on the awaited posting order, has been given charge of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment and Panchayati Raj. ACS Subodh Agarwal has been appointed as Chairman of Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj Institute; Abhay Kumar has been given charge of the Public Health Engineering Department and water resources; Aparna Arora shifted to Revenue Department; Sandeep Verma to the Public Works Department; and Shreya Guha to the Transport Department. *—PTI*

Defeat in Karanpur poll is 'lesson' for BJP: Cong

JAIPUR, 10 JAN

Taking a dig at BJP after its defeat in the Karanpur assembly election, Rajasthan Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra on Wednesday said this is a "lesson" for the saffron party. In a setback to the newly formed BJP government, Minister of State Surendra Pal Singh on January 8 lost the election in Sriganganagar district's Karanpur by a margin of 11,283 votes to his Congress rival Rupinder Singh Kooner. Dotasra said the people of Karanpur have done the work of rejecting the BJP government and this is a lesson for them. "They should work on the issues of the people and according to the sentiments of the people," he added. Dotasra said that it has been more than a month but the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has not done any work in the state. "The government has only changed the names of our schemes, weakened our schemes and those who were given employment by our Congress were removed," he added. *—PTI*

104 Myanmarese soldiers who fled to Mizo, sent back

AIZAWL, 10 JAN

A total of 104 Myanmarese soldiers, who fled to Mizoram during armed clashes with an ethnic insurgent group in the neighbouring country, have been sent back, an Assam Rifles official said on Wednesday. Over 350 such soldiers have now been sent back to Myanmar by Indian defence authorities between November last year and January, she said.The Myanmarese soldiers, also known as 'Tatmadaw,' crossed the Indian border and entered Lungpuk in south Mizoram's Siaha district on January 6, she said. *—PTI*

Kharge in touch with leaders of INDIA bloc parties: Cong

Kharge said discussions on issues within the alliance will be taken up soon

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

After initiating seat-sharing talks with various Opposition parties, the Congress on Wednesday said its President Mallikarjun Kharge is in touch with leaders of all INDIA bloc constituents to ensure closer coordination in the Opposition alliance.

The assertion comes amid talk that the alliance could have a convener, with the name of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar doing the rounds for the post.

There have also been demands for having an office and a spokesperson of the Opposition alliance, where 28 parties have come together to take on the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

" Kharge is in touch with leaders of all parties of the INDIA bloc on how best to give structure to ensure closer coordination in alliance," AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

He said the Congress president has also talked to all leaders, including Nitish Kumar, and decisions on key issues within the alliance will be taken soon.

Ramesh also said that discussions have started with all political parties, with some being in an advanced stage and some still in the initial phase.

"Talks on seat-sharing with TMC in West Bengal and with JD(U) in Bihar are expected to take place in a day or two," he said. *—PTI*

There have been demands for having an office and a spokesperson of the alliance, to take on the BJP in elections *PHOTO: PTI*

CONGRESS NOT EVEN ELIGIBLE AS OPPOSITION PARTY, SAYS NADDA

GUWAHATI, 10 JAN

BJP national President Jagat Prakash Nadda on Wednesday criticised the Congress, saying they are "not eligible" of becoming the country's opposition party due to their response to the recent Maldives controversy.

Addressing party workers during the executive meeting of Assam BJP, he criticised Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's reaction to the recent statements by three Maldivian ministers. Nadda said, "They (Congress) were not capable of running a government. Now, they are not even eligible to be an opposition party."

On the recent spat on social media with Maldives, Kharge had accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of taking everything personally.

Nadda also criticised opposition alliance INDIA, claiming that it was formed to protect the black money and the families of the leaders of the respective parties. "All the leaders involved have CBI cases against them.

It's an alliance formed for personal gains. It has no relation to India. Should we give them a chance to proceed? We need Modi's honesty, stability and progress," he emphasised.

Regarding the Congress' proposed Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, the BJP chief suggested that the march should instead be called Bharat Todo Anyay Yatra. "They have committed all sorts of injustices and have done everything to break India, but now they are organising a march for justice! White is white and black is black, and nobody can change that," he added.

The yatra, to be led by MP Rahul Gandhi, will commence from Imphal on 14 January and culminate in Mumbai on 20 March.

The Assam leg of the march is scheduled from 18 to 25 January. *—PTI*

Disruptions part of 'sanskar' of Left govt in Ker: Guv

MALAPPURAM, 10 JAN

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan on Wednesday took a dig at the ruling Left in the state, saying that "disruptions, dishonour and protests" are part of their 'sanskar' (manners) and that is why they engage in agitations even when they have been elected to power.

Khan, referring to the black "clothes" waved at him by SFI, DYFI and CPI(M) activists along the route to Ponnani here, said it was "most unfortunate" that the members of the party responsible for maintaining law and order in the state were creating disruption on the roads.

Activists of the CPI(M) and its student wing- Students Federation of India (SFI)- and youth wing- Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI)- waved black flags at the Governor along the route to a commemoration programme organised by the Congress party in Ponnani here that he was going to attend.

"If an alien, someone who does not know this place, asks who they (protestors) are, what reply will you give? They are members of a party which has been elected to run the government in Kerala.

"If they belong to the ruling party, how come they are protesting? Have you ever heard of any ruling party protesting? The reply would be- that they are so used to, their sanskars are so used to disruption, dishonour and protests that they forget they have been chosen to rule the state. It is unfortunate,"

Khan said taking a dig at the ruling Left in the state.

He said that is how some people are and that it was actually their sanskars. "If you have been brought up and trained in a particular manner, then it becomes very difficult to change your nature.

So you keep doing it disregarding all the obligations and duties which are cast upon you by the people of the state," the Governor said. *—PTI*

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan *PHOTO: PTI*

Congress has lost its mind as Ravana did in Treta Yug: BJP

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

BJP on Wednesday slammed Congress after Party Chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury declined the invitation to attend the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya and said they have lost their mind as Ravana did in Treta Yug.

Congress on Wednesday announced that Kharge, Sonia and Chowdhury have "respectfully declined" the invitation to attend the Ram temple consecration ceremony, alleging that it has been made into a "political project" by the BJP and the RSS for "electoral gain". Reacting to the development, BJP national spokesperson Nalin Kohli told PTI, "The Congress is officially saying that its senior leaders will not be there in Ayodhya on January 22 should come as no surprise because over the last few decades, it really took no steps to see that there should be a temple in Ayodhya."

BJP leader said that the former Congress-led UPA government had in fact filed an affidavit before the Supreme Court to deny the existence of Lord Ram. "They never wanted an early hearing of the issue. Now that a temple has come up there, the very fact that they are saying they won't be there is part of what they have always believed. They didn't want a temple there," he added.

Kohli said the Congress' allegation that it is an event of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is just "an excuse". "Because in reality, this does not fit with the Congress party's own thinking. Otherwise they would have been there out of affection for Lord Ram and would have been in Ayodhya and share the excitement of millions of Indians all across the world and India," the BJP leader added. *—PTI*

Ayodhya Ram Mandir model | *PHOTO: SHRI RAM JANMABHOOMI TEERTH KSHETRA TRUST*

2100-KG BELL, 108-FT-LONG INCENSE STICK: GIFTS FOR AYODHYA TEMPLE

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

A 108-foot-long incense stick, a 2,100-kg bell, a giant lamp weighing 1,100 kg, gold footwear, a 10-foot-high lock and key, and a clock that simultaneously denotes time in eight countries are among the special gifts sent for the Ram temple in Ayodhya ahead of the consecration ceremony on 22 January. The artistes behind the unique gifts are hoping their gifts will be used at the grand temple.

Adding to the religious fervour, the gifts are being received from all parts of the country and even abroad.

More than 3,000 gifts for Lord Ram from Sita's birthplace in Janakpur in Nepal have arrived in Ayodhya. The gifts, including silver shoes, ornaments and clothes, were transported in a convoy of around 30 vehicles from the Janakpur Dham Ramjanaki Temple in Nepal to Ayodhya this week.

A Sri Lankan delegation also visited Ayodhya with a special gift from the Ashok Vatika. The delegation presented a rock from the Ashok Vatika, a garden mentioned in the epic Ramayana where Ravan captivated Sita.The first phase of the temple is nearing completion and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will take part in the consecration ceremony at the temple on 22 January. The Supreme Court delivered a historic verdict in 2019, settling a temple-mosque dispute that dated back more than a century. The court backed the construction of a Ram temple ruled for an alternative five-acre plot for building a mosque. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Holiday in institutions on 22 Jan in UP

LUCKNOW, 10 JAN

The Lucknow University has rescheduled examinations slated for 22 January, the day of the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.The exams scheduled for 22 January have been postponed and the new dates announced, a senior university official said on Wednesday.

After Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced a holiday in all academic institutions across the state on 22 January, the university has also postponed the examinations on the day, he said.

The revised examination schedule for subjects, including commerce, physics, chemistry, software development and biochemistry, among others, has been released on the university website, according to the official.

The Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday declared a holiday for all academic institutions in the state on the day of the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple. *—PTI*

BRIJ SLAMS INVITES TO OPPN LEADERS

BARABANKI, 10 JAN

BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh has voiced opposition to inviting the leaders of opposition parties who "created obstacles" in the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya for its consecration ceremony scheduled for 22 January.

"The Opposition, which created hurdles in the construction of the temple at every step, should not be invited to Ayodhya at all," he told reporters on the sidelines of a programme at Rasauli in the Safdarganj area of this Uttar Pradesh district on Tuesday evening.According to reports, invitations for the Ram temple consecration ceremony have been sent to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and the leader of the party in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Choudhary. *—PTI*

PANEL TO DECIDE ON 'CHIN KUKIS' ST STATUS: CM

IMPHAL, 10 JAN

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh has said that an all-tribe committee would be formed to decide on whether the Chin Kuki community would remain on the Scheduled Tribes list of the state.

The chief minister's statement comes in the wake of a letter by the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs seeking the state government's views on the demand for deletion of the "nomadic Chin Kuki" community from Manipur's ST list.

The demand was made by Maheshwar Thounaojam, National Secretary of the Republican Party of India (Athawale), who claimed that members of that community are not indigenous people of India but immigrants.

"They were included in the (ST) list of Manipur but how they were included needs to be re-examined. Before making a comment, we have to form a committee consisting of all tribes (of the state)," Singh told reporters here on Tuesday. After getting the panel's recommendations, the state government will be able to send its view on the matter, he said.The Chin community people also share ethnicity with the Mizos of Mizoram and a section of the residents of neighbouring Myanmar. Manipur has been rocked by ethnic violence since May last year and over 180 people were killed. *—PTI*

India and Czech Republic review ties, discuss on various sectors

GANDHINAGAR, 10 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Czech Republic counterpart Petr Fiala on Wednesday held a bilateral meeting here on the sidelines of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit where both leaders reviewed relations between the two countries and held discussions on various sectors.

A joint statement after the meeting said India and the Czech Republic are committed to deeper engagement within the Indo-Pacific region based on an open, with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.Modi and the Czech prime minister reviewed bilateral relations at the meeting and held discussions on various sectors, including new and emerging technologies, automobiles, climate change, and defence, officials said.On the development of a relationship based on long-standing ties and the shared desire for international peace, the joint statement said. "Committed to deeper engagement within the Indo-Pacific region based on an open, inclusive and rules-based approach with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and recognizing the promotion of effective rules-based multilateralism as a way to achieve global prosperity," it said. *—PTI*

Biswa: Cleared 8K hectares encroached by B'deshis

GUWAHATI, 10 JAN

- The eviction drives has been carried out in different parts of the state since Sarma assumed power in May 2021

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the government has cleared 8,000 hectares of forest land, encroached by suspected Bangladeshi people.The government also evicted 48,000 families from across the state for encroaching on the forest and public land, Sarma said while addressing the Assam BJP's Executive Meeting, attended by its national president J P Nadda."We have been working day and night to clear the forests of Assam from encroachers.

We have cleared 8,000 hectares of land from suspected Bangladeshi people and more than 48,000 houses have been evicted," he added. Sarma, however, said the government has rehabilitated the poor families who were evicted.

The Himanta Biswa Sarma-led dispensation has been carrying out eviction drives in different parts of the state since it assumed power in May 2021. *—PTI*

'M'rashtra Speaker's verdict not surprising'

PUNE, 10 JAN

Maharashtra Assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar's verdict in the Shiv Sena MLAs disqualification case, which went in favour of the faction led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, was "not at all surprising", but it should be challenged in the Supreme Court by the rival group led by Uddhav Thackeray, NCP founder Sharad Pawar said on Wednesday.

In a huge relief to Shinde, Narwekar, pronouncing his verdict in the case on Wednesday, held that the Shiv Sena faction led by him was the "real political party" when rival groups emerged in June 2022.

Reacting to the much-awaited verdict, Pawar said looking at the speaker's ruling, the Thackeray-led Sena faction will have to approach the Supreme Court

Sharad Pawar *PHOTO: PTI*

'PM WILL GIVE HOUSES'

R'than min urges people to have more kids

JAIPUR, 10 JAN

Rajasthan minister Babulal Kharadi has asked people to have more children, saying there should be no problem as Prime Minister Narendra Modi will build houses for them.

Kharadi, the tribal area development minister in the desert state, said it is a dream of the prime minister that no one will go to sleep hungry and without a roof over their head. "It is a dream of the prime minister that no one should sleep hungry and without a roof over their head. You give birth to lots of children. Pradhan mantriji will build your houses, then what is the problem?" Kharadi asked while addressing a public meeting in Udaipur on Tuesday.

Kharadi has eight children- four sons and as many daughters - from two wives. The entire family lives in Neechla Thala village, about three kilometres from Kotda tehsil of Udaipur. Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma shared the dais with the tribal area development minister on the occasion. The stage was set up for a "Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra camp" in Udaipur's Nai village.

As Kharadi made the statement, those in the audience burst out laughing and the people's representatives present on the occasion were seen looking at each other. Kharadi urged the people to vote for Modi again in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls as he said the BJP-led Centre is initiating various public welfare measures.He said the Centre has reduced the LPG cylinder prices by Rs 200 and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Rajasthan is now making the cylinders available to people under the Ujjwala Scheme for Rs 450.He was elected as an MLA for the fourth time in the 2023 Assembly polls from Jhadol. He was adjudged the best MLA in 2022 during the 15th Rajasthan Assembly. He was recently inducted as a cabinet minister in the state. *—PTI*

Rajasthan minister Babulal Kharadi *PHOTO: PTI*

'No vote to Mamata' call during Kolkata rally

KOLKATA, 10 JAN

In a direct attack on the ruling Trinamool Congress, many of whose leaders and ministers are currently under scrutiny by central agencies for alleged scandals and some of whom are even incarcerated, senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday gave the 'No Vote To Mamata' call to the electorate ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Adhikari, who led the rally here attended by thousands, came down heavily on the Left Front for their 'No Vote To BJP' campaign ahead of the 2021 Assembly polls, which had "helped the corrupt TMC regime" return to power and "continue their reign of loot and misgovernance."About the arrests of TMC heavyweights by central agencies in connection with graft, Adhikari said, "Had it not been for Modiji in power at the Centre, people like Partha Chatterjee, Kesto (Anubrata Mandal), and Jyoti Priyo Mallick would not have been lodged in jail. There are many others still outside, but they will also not be spared." *—PTI*

Malayalam director Vinu dies after brief illness in Coimbatore

T'PURAM, 10 JAN

Popular Malayalam filmmaker Vinu, who helmed a handful of hit movies in collaboration with director Suresh, died in a hospital in Coimbatore following a brief illness, industry sources said on Wednesday.

The 73-year-old filmmaker was admitted to the hospital recently for some abdomen-related ailments, the sources said. He is survived by his wife and two children.

The Suresh-Vinu pair gave several successful Malayalam movies including 'Mangalam Veettil Manaseshwari Gupta', 'Kusruthi Kattu' and 'Ayushman Bhava' among others. Their last collaborative effort was the 2008 movie 'Kanichukulangarayil CBI'. FEFKA Directors' Union, an organisation of Malayalam filmmakers condoled his demise. Vinu was working on a new psychological thriller film, it said in a Facebook post. Vinu would be cremated in Coimbatore on Thursday, it added. *—PTI*

U'khand schools to have 'bag-free' day each month

DEHRADUN, 10 JAN

Uttarakhand government has decided to introduce 10 "bag-free" days per academic session in all the schools of the state in an initiative meant to reduce the load of books on children. One bag-free day will be observed by all upper primary and secondary schools on the last Saturday of each month from class 6 to class 12 each academic year. The initiative has been introduced in line with the new National Education Policy, 2020, it said. On such days, students will go to school without a load of books and indulge in various activities in accordance with their interests and aptitude. *—PTI*

Woman, husband, daughter killed by family in Bihar

BHAGALPUR, 10 JAN

A woman her husband and their daughter were allegedly killed by her father and brother in Bihar's Bhagalpur district, police said on Wednesday. The deceased are Chandni Kumari, 23; Chandan Kumar, 40, and Roshni Kumari, 2. The accused are Pappu Singh and his son Dheeraj Kumar Singh. According to villagers Chandan Kumar and Chandani Kumari had a love marriage three years ago. Chandani's father was unhappy over the marriage. "The incident took place at around 4.25 pm on Tuesday when the trio were returning to their home in Navtolia village. When Pappu Singh noticed them, he first stopped them and started hitting them with an iron rod. They fell unconscious. Pappu's son-Dheeraj Singh then shot them from point-blank range. *—PTI*

IAF to organise aerial display in Mumbai from 12 Jan

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

The Indian Air Force will organise an aerial display in Mumbai over the Marine Drive from 12 to 14 January between 12 noon and 1 pm as part of an outreach programme. It is aimed at creating awareness and fostering a deeper connection between the IAF and the local community.

The displays and demonstrations by IAF personnel and aircraft will showcase the skills, capabilities and professionalism of the force.

The event will comprise aerobatic displays by the Suryakiran Aerobatic Display Team (SKAT) and the 'Sarang' Helicopter display team. PTI

The event would also feature a diverse range of aerial activities, including a flypast and low-level aerobatic display by the Su-30 MKI, freefall and parachute displays by the 'Akashganga' team and C-130 aircraft. *—PTI*

Lack of snow in Kashmir disappoints tourists

The lack of snow will hit tourism as well agriculture and water supply

SRINAGAR, 10 JAN

Scores of tourists returned home from Kashmir without getting a feel of snow. The lack of snowfall in the valley this winter will not only hit tourism and related activities, but also badly affect agriculture and allied activities.

A large number of tourists, who arrived here on the New Year's Eve in the hope of enjoying skiing and other snow-related activities in the Gulmarg bowl, had to go back disappointed due to the lack of snowfall.

"We had booked a seven-day package to enjoy the snow in Gulmarg. But there is no snow. We had expected a white landscape all over the place but it is brown like any other region of north India," Pankaj Singh, a Delhi resident, said.

People associated with the tourism industry are worried that no snowfall in Kashmir in winter would adversely affect the livelihood of thousands of people in the valley.

"This winter has been a bad advertisement for our trade. Although Kashmir is not the only place that witnessed a lack of snow, our winter tourism mostly depends on snowfall," Muzaffar Ahmad, a tour operator from the city, said.

National Conference (NC) leader Omar Abdullah, an avid skier, expressed his concern on the lack of snow in the mountains, which can lead to problems for the valley residents in the summer.

"I've never seen Gulmarg so dry in the winter. To put this into perspective, here are a couple of photographs from previous years, both taken on the 6th of Jan. If we don't get snow soon the summer is going to be miserable," Abdullah posted in X.

People are worried that no snowfall in Kashmir during winters will adversely affect the livelihood of thousands of people in the valley *PHOTO: X/ @MUSSEGAREEB_*

According to local farmers, with very little snowfall even in the higher reaches of Kashmir this winter, the agricultural produce in the valley can be severely affected.

"The melting of snow at the onset of summer in the higher reaches of Kashmir is the main source of water for our rivers and streams. With no snow on the mountains, people in the plains will suffer. Crops will take a hit as there will be water scarcity for irrigation," Mohammad Akbar Ganai, a farmer from Nowgam, said.

Another X user posted a video of a wildfire sweeping through the Gulmarg golf course -- a phenomenon hitherto unthinkable in the month of January.

An official of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said there has been a large deficit in winter snowfall in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Ladakh this year and the situation is unlikely to change before Republic Day."There is no forecast of any active Western Disturbance or snowfall till 25 January. The satellite image from the MeT centre at Leh shows a grim picture of rapid melting of glaciers," Sonam Lotus, Director, IMD Leh Centre, said.

According to the IMD's data, December 2023 saw 79-per cent deficit rainfall, while the first 10 days of January this year have also been dry. *—PTI*

'Foreign powers fuelling anti-India narrative in Male'

Reportedly, the growing influence of China and Pakistan is countering India's soft power *PHOTO: PTI*

KOLKATA, 10 JAN

Amid diplomatic row, Syed Tanveer Nasreen, the former director of the Indian Cultural Centre in Maldives, said the prevailing situation is not isolated but a manifestation of a prolonged anti-India sentiment, fostered by foreign powers.

Nasreen shared insights into the growing influence of China and Pakistan in countering India's soft power.

She cautioned against reactionary sentiments such as the "Boycott Maldives" movement, viewing them as potential fuel for the "India Out" campaign and undue importance of the now-suspended Maldivian ministers' remarks on social media, targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

She said although the previous MDP government in Maldives had been India-friendly, the opposition politics that gained momentum during the Covid period "revolved against India" and sought the removal of the Indian military and pushed for cultural and social disengagement.

"I spoke to one of those who used to participate in anti-India campaigns and at times also used to perform at collaborative cultural events. He told me that for participating in anti-India campaigns he used to get dresses, food and money, so in the evening he along with his family members often participated in such campaigns for extra money," she said. This, she argued, demonstrates the "influx of foreign funds aimed at escalating anti-India sentiments" in the archipelago.

—PTI

LAKSHADWEEP PLANS TOURISM EXPANSION

KAVARATTI, 10 JAN

Amid the row over the disparaging remarks by Maldivian ministers and government officials against Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his recent visit to Lakshadweep, the administration in the Indian archipelago stated it was working on plans to expand its tourism activities.

According to officials in the Union Territory (UT), several proposals have been sent to the Union government to harness the latent tourism potential in the island cluster.

While there is an airstrip in Agatti islands currently, plans are afoot to build a larger airport that can accommodate Airbus-type aircraft in Minicoy Island. Hotel projects are also in varying stages of implementation in several virgin islands under the Smart City project, in a bid to draw more tourists from across the country and overseas.

Minicoy Island, a picturesque strip of land surrounded by pristine blue waters, is believed to be at the heart of the tourism expansion plans of the Lakshadweep administration. *—ANI*

SC adjourns Umar's plea in UAPA case

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday adjourned till 24 January the hearing on the bail plea of former JNU student Umar Khalid in a case lodged under anti-terror law UAPA. The case is over his alleged involvement in the conspiracy behind the north-east Delhi riots of February 2020.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal deferred the matter after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for Khalid, sought adjournment saying he was busy in a Constitution bench matter.

Sibal said even Additional Solicitor General SV Raju was not available.

Supreme Court judge Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra had on August 9 recused himself from hearing Khalid's plea.

Khalid's petition challenging the 18 October, 2022 order of Delhi High Court, which had rejected his bail plea in the matter, had come up for hearing before a bench of Justices AS Bopanna and Mishra.

High Court had rejected Khalid's bail plea, saying he was in constant touch with other co-accused and the allegations against him were prima facie true.

High Court had also said the actions of the accused qualified as "terrorist act" under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, and several others have been booked under the anti-terror law UAPA and several provisions of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 riots, which left 53 people dead. *—PTI*

Navy flags off Adani made Drishti 10 Starliner drones

HYDERABAD, 10 JAN

Adani Defence and Aerospace on Wednesday unveiled its indigenously manufactured Drishti 10 Starliner Unmanned Aerial Vehicle for the Indian Navy.

The flag-off ceremony was led by Admiral R Hari Kumar, the Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS), India Navy, who was present at the event with 75 Navy personnel, as the UAV left from Hyderabad for Porbandar to be inducted into naval maritime operations.

Drishti 10 Starliner is an advanced Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platform with 36 hours endurance, 450 kg payload capacity, the only all-weather military platform with STANAG 4671 certification and clear to fly in both segregated and unsegregated airspace.

Drishti 10 Starliner is an advanced Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platform *PHOTO: PTI*

Hari Kumar lauded Adani's efforts in aligning their roadmap to the requirements of the Navy and establishing an ecosystem of partners and capabilities to enable Aatmanirbharta in defence and security. Jeet Adani, VP, Adani Enterprises, said the recent geopolitical events have reinforced convergence of physical, informational and cognitive tactics underpinned by intelligence, information processing capabilities, use of unmanned and cyber systems for dissemination of information. *—PTI*

DELHI'S WINTER POWER DEMAND AT ALL-TIME HIGH

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The continuing cold conditions in Delhi further pushed peak winter power demand to an all-time high of 5611 MW on Wednesday morning, discom officials said. As per real-time data of State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC) Delhi, the peak power demand was 5611 MW at 11.08 AM, they said.

The previous all-time high winter peak demand was 5559 MW last Friday, they said.

The spike in power demand is mainly due to enhanced use of electricity by consumers for heating purposes, discom officials said. The minimum temperature in Delhi on Friday was recorded at 7.1 degrees Celsius. *—PTI*

Kochi Metro starts WhatsApp based ticketing facility

KOCHI, 10 JAN

As part of efforts to promote digital ticketing and enhance e-payments, Kochi Metro Rail Limited (KMRL) is introducing a ticketing facility on the WhatsApp platform. Passengers can book digital tickets through WhatsApp from Wednesday by sending a message to the KMRL's WhatsApp number, officials said. Commuters will get a 10 per cent discount on tickets purchased through WhatsApp during normal hours and a 50 per cent discount during non-peak hours (5.45 am to 7 am and 10 pm to 11 pm), a KMRL said. This initiative is expected to promote digital ticketing, enhance paperless ticketing and avoid queuing at ticket counters. KMRL and its ticketing partner Axis Bank are experimenting with the use of Kochi-1 cards for commuting in buses, feeder buses, and feeder autorickshaws in addition to Kochi Metro and Water Metro, the statement further said. In 2024, all efforts are being made to reach an average ridership of one lakh per day on Kochi Metro, it said, adding that interoperable tickets for Metro and Water Metro would be introduced. *—PTI*

9 of 11 Bilkis' convicts 'missing'

DAHOD, 10 JAN

A senior police official in Dahod has said they have not yet received any information about the surrender of 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano gangrape case after the Supreme Court quashed the Gujarat government's decision to grant them remission.

Meanwhile, there are reports that nine of eleven convicts were reported to be "missing"

A police force remains deployed in the area where the convicts live to maintain peace, an official said.

The convicts, however, are "not incommunicado" and some of them are visiting relatives, Dahod Superintendent of Police Balram Meena said on Tuesday.

Bilkis Bano, then 21 years old and five months pregnant, was raped while fleeing after communal riots broke out in the aftermath of the Godhra train burning incident in 2002.

Her three-year-old daughter and six other family members were killed. Supreme Court on Monday quashed the remission granted to the 11 convicts while slamming the Gujarat government for abusing its discretion.

It ordered all the convicts, who were released prematurely on Independence Day in 2022, back to jail within two weeks. *—PTI*

Kerala professor's palm chopping accused held after 13 yrs

KANNUR/NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday arrested the key and last absconding accused, who had been in hiding for over 13 years, in the mutilation of a college professor's hand in Kerala.

The right hand of TJ Joseph, professor of Newman College in Thodupuzha in Idukki district, was chopped off by activists of the now banned radical Islamic outfit Popular Front of India (PFI) on 4 July, 2010.

The accused -- Savad -- had been on the run for the last 13 years and was carrying a reward of Rs 10 lakh for his arrest.

He was nabbed from Mattannur in the northern Kerala district of Kannur on Wednesday.

Joseph said that he was not concerned much with the arrest of the prime accused in the case as he still believes that the main culprits, the "masterminds" behind the attack on him, were still in hiding.

In July last year, an NIA court sentenced to life imprisonment three of the six people convicted in the 2010 case.

The remaining three convicts were sentenced to three years for harbouring the offenders in the case.

The attack took place while the professor was returning home with his family after attending Sunday mass at a church in Muvattupuzha in Ernakulam district.

The attackers, a group of seven people, pulled the professor out of the vehicle, assaulted him and then his right hand was chopped off by the main accused Savad. *—PTI*

IN A FIRST

All-women Delhi police contingent to march on R-Day

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

For the first time in its history, the Delhi Police will have an all-women contingent marching down the Kartavya Path during the Republic Day parade on 26 January.

To provide a fillip to gender equality and women empowerment, the marching contingent of Delhi Police will comprise only women personnel and 80 per cent of the participants from the force in the 75th Republic Day parade this year are from the north-eastern states.

According to the police, it follows a policy of recruiting people from the eight states in the north-east to "bridge the gap" between the force and the people from that region.

Over 80 per cent of the participants from the force in Republic Day parade this year are from the northeastern states *PHOTO: ANI*

Shweta K Sugathan, an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, will lead the marching contingent of 194 female head constables and constables of the force.

The participants practise daily at the Kartyava Path=.

According to Special Commissioner of Police (Armed Police) Robin Hibu, all the members of the contingent will take part in the parade for the first time this year and are "very excited".

> Another officer said the all-women marching contingent will "definitely be the centre of attraction" during the parade.

Hibu said the Delhi Police has added another feather in its cap this year as the women's pipe band will be led by a female officer -- constable Ruyangunuo Kense.

The band comprising 135 head constables and constables will play the "Delhi Police Song", he added.

Last year, a female-dedicated pipe band was inducted in the parade, but it was led by a male inspector, Rajender Singh.

Another officer said the all-women marching contingent will "definitely be the centre of attraction" during the parade.

The defence ministry had last year asked all the forces, state governments and departments participating in the Republic Day parade to have women participants in their contingents, bands and tableaux. *—PTI*

SC orders HC panels for judicial pay commission

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Supreme Court has directed the constitution of a two-judge committee in each High Court for the implementation of the orders on pay, pension and other retirement benefits for judicial officers. This is under the Second National Judicial Pay Commission. Supreme Court observed that there is a need to maintain uniformity in service conditions of judicial officers across the country,

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud said Judicial independence, which is necessary to preserve the faith and confidence of common citizens in the rule of law, can be ensured and enhanced only so long as judges are able to lead their life with a sense of financial dignity.

"The conditions of service while a judge is in service must ensure a dignified existence. The post-retirement conditions of service have a crucial bearing on the dignity and independence of the office of a judge and how it is perceived by society. If the service of the judiciary is to be a viable career option so as to attract talent, conditions of service, both for working and retired officers, must offer security and dignity," the bench, also comprising Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra, said. *—PTI*

ENGINEERING MARVEL

Tibet train runs on the world's highest rail rack, Qinghai Tibet railway stretched across the Himalayan table-top plateau for almost 2,000km, from Xining in central China to Lhasa in Tibet
PHOTO: BBC NEWS

Israel, Hezbollah eager to avoid tit-for-tat attacks

The killing of a Hezbollah commander in southern Lebanon on 8 January, has raised concern that the conflict between Israel and Hamas could escalate into a regional war.

Wissam al-Tawil, the head of a unit that operates on Lebanon's southern border, was killed in a targeted Israeli airstrike just days after a senior Hamas leader was assassinated in Beirut and amid sporadic attacks by Hezbollah on Israeli targets.

But how likely is a full-scale conflict between Israel and Hezbollah?

Wissam al-Tawil, a Lebanese militant was killed in a targeted Israeli airstrike just days after a senior Hamas leader was assassinated in Beirut and amid attacks by Hezbollah on Israeli targets
PHOTO: REUTERS

What do we know about the latest strike?

We know that it was an Israeli drone that killed al-Tawil. Hezbollah has since released picture of him with Hassan Nasrallah, the group's secretary general, and Qassem Soleiman, the former head of Quds Force – one of Iran's main military branches – who was assassinated by the US in 2020. This suggests that al-Tawil was a major target for Israel, as he clearly had connections with top figures in Lebanon and Iran.

The fact that it was a drone attack is also important. This suggests that the operation was based on good Israeli intelligence on al-Tawil's whereabouts. This wasn't a chance encounter. This was clearly a calculated and precise attack.

After the operation, Israel said al-Tawil was responsible for a recent missile attack on Israel's Mount Meron intelligence base in northern Israel. That attack was in response to the earlier assassination of a Hamas leader in Beirut.So what we are seeing is a pattern of tit-for-tat strikes.

So this doesn't mark an escalation?

There are some important things to note in that regard. It was just 10 kilometers north of the Israel-Lebanon border. This is still within the geographical area where the two sides have been exchanging fire since the 7 October attack by Hamas in Israel. So this is still within the realm of border skirmishes, to my mind, and falls short of full war.

Is it in the interests of Israel to escalate conflict?

For Israel, the pressure is from outside the country. There is immense international pressure on Israel not to start a full-blown war with Hezbollah. Indeed, US Secrtary of State Antony Blinken is currently in the region and visiting Israel with that message: Do not start a war with Hezbollah.

There is a realization that a full-blown war between Hezbollah and Israel will decimate Lebanon and also lead to major destruction in Israel.

What about pressure within Israel?

Certainly within Israel there is a strong lobby for war with Hezbollah. The thinking among Israeli military hawks here is a powerful military blow against Hezbollah would allow people living in the north of Israel to return to homes they evacuated when it looked like war might be in the cards.

Indeed, the Israeli Ministry of Defense wanted preemptive war with Hezbollah after the 7 October attack by Hamas. But US President Joe Biden stopped that from happening for the same reason that Blinken is currently trying to dissuade Israel from further escalating the conflict.

And what about Hezbollah? How might it respond?

Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader, is between a rock and a hard place. The majority of Lebanese people clearly do not want a war. But any attack resulting in the deaths of high-ranking Hezbollah figures will be met by internal demands for action.

But there is a tipping point for Hezbollah, as there is for the Israelis too – which is why this tit-for-tat pattern is such a risky matter.

On the Lebanese side, if Israel hits strategic Hezbollah assets deep in Lebanon – that is, outside the border areas – or launch an attack that leads to mass civilian deaths then it might lead to full-blown conflict. But so far that has not been the case. The attacks by Israel have been surgical and precise. In the case of the Hamas leader killed in Beirut, it was only Palestinians killed.

Does Iran have any role in influencing Hezbollah's response?

Iran has immense influence over Hezbollah – it pays for military operations and equipment.But Hezbollah is not only an Iranian proxy; it has domestic considerations, and its interests lie with the Lebanese political scene. For that reason, Hezbollah is attuned to the domestic popular pressure in Lebanon against a war.But a full war between Israel and Hezbollah may draw Iran into direct confrontation with Israel and the US And that is something that leaders in Tehran will most likely not want, especially after a terror attack in Iran on 3 January exposed how vulnerable Iran is internally.

—Courtesy, The Conversation

SALAR سالار

1L bottled water could contain 2.4L plastic pieces: Study

A litre of bottled water could contain about 2.4 lakh plastic pieces on average, which is about 10 to 100 times greater than previous estimates that mainly concerned plastics of larger sizes, according to a new study.

While microplastics range from a micrometre -- a millionth of a metre -- to 5 millimetres, nanoplastics are smaller than a micrometre and are measured in billionths of a metre.

Researchers from Columbia University analysed three popular brands of bottled water sold in the US, measuring plastic particles down to 100 nanometres in size.

They detected about 1.1-3.7 lakh plastic fragments in each litre -- 90 per cent nanoplastics and the rest microplastics. Their findings are published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"Previously this was just a dark area, uncharted. Toxicity studies were just guessing what's in there," said study co-author Beizhan Yan, an environmental chemist at Columbia Climate School's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

"This opens a window where we can look into a world that was not exposed to us before," he said.

In recent years, microplastics have been documented to be present in soil, drinking water, food and even polar ice.

Formed when larger plastics break down into progressively smaller bits, these plastics find their way into humans and other creatures, with potential effects on their health and ecosystem.

In this study, the team also determined the type of plastics they were, targeting seven common ones, along with charting their shapes for biomedical purposes.

The study identified 1.1-3.7 lakh plastic fragments per litre, primarily nanoplastics (90%) and microplastics (10%) ***PHOTO: REUTERS***

They found a common one -- polyethylene terephthalate or PET. Water bottles are made of this material.

Another type of plastic the researchers found was polyamide. A type of nylon, polyamide was found in greater quantity than PET. They said the nylon could have come from the plastic fibres that are supposed to purify the water before it gets bottled.

Other common plastics they found were polystyrene, polyvinyl chloride and polymethyl methacrylate -- all used in various industrial processes.

However, the seven plastic types the researchers searched for accounted for only about 10 per cent of all the nanoparticles they found in the bottled water samples.

The researchers said they had no idea what the rest were.

The results indicated "the complicated particle composition inside the seemingly simple water sample", they wrote.

For the study, the researchers developed a technique called stimulated Raman scattering microscopy which involved probing samples with two simultaneous lasers tuned to make specific molecules resonate. They then used algorithms to analyse and interpret the data.

The team is now going beyond bottled water.

"There is a huge world of nanoplastics to be studied," said study co-author Wei Min, a Columbia biophysicist and a co-inventor of the microscopy technique.

He said though nanoplastics have less mass than microplastics, it's not the size that matters but the numbers because the smaller things are, the more easily they can get inside humans.

"It is not totally unexpected to find so much of this stuff," said lead author, Naixin Qian, a graduate student in chemistry from Columbia University. "The idea is that the smaller things get, the more of them there are."

—PTI

The common plastics the researchers found were polystyrene, polyvinyl chloride and polymethyl methacrylate which are used in various industrial processes ***PHOTO: REUTERS***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Indian men conned by 'impregnating women' scam

As cyber scams go, this one is rather unique.

In early December Mangesh Kumar (name changed) was scrolling on Facebook when he came across a video from the "All India Pregnant Job Service" and decided to check it out.

The job sounded too good to be true: money - and lots of it - in return for getting a woman pregnant.

It was, of course, too good to be true. So far, the 33-year-old, who earns 15,000 rupees ($180; £142) per month working for a wedding party decoration company, has already lost 16,000 rupees to fraudsters - and they are asking for more.

But Mangesh, from the northern Indian state of Bihar, is not the only person to fall for the scam.

Deputy superintendent of police Kalyan Anand, who heads the cyber cell in Bihar's Nawada district, told the BBC there were hundreds of victims of an elaborate con where gullible men were lured to part with their cash on the promise of a huge pay day, and a night in a hotel with a childless woman.

So far, his team have arrested eight men, seized nine mobile phones and a printer, and are still searching for 18 others.

But finding the victims has proved more tricky.

"The gang has been active for a year and we believe they have conned hundreds of people, but no-one has so far come forward to complain, possibly because of shame," he explained.

"Ten minutes after I'd clicked on the video, my phone rang. The man asked me to pay 799 rupees if I wanted to register for the job," he said.

The caller - Mangesh calls him Sandeep sir - told him that he would be working for a company in Mumbai and that once he had signed up, he would be sent details of the woman he would have to impregnate.

They offered him half a million rupees - almost three years wages - just to have sex with the woman and promised further reward of 800,000 rupees if she conceived.

"I'm a poor man, I desperately need money so I believed them," the father of two young boys told me.

Over the next couple of weeks, Mangesh was asked to fork out more than 16,000 rupees - 2,550 rupees to obtain some court documents, 4,500 as safety deposit and 7,998 rupees as Goods and Services Tax (GST) on the money he was going to get.

Police have arrested eight men, seized nine mobile phones and a printer, and are looking for 18 others who are absconding ***PHOTO: AFP***

He's shared all the receipts and the fake court papers with me - the official-looking document has his name and carries his photograph along with that of a man in police uniform. In big capital letters on top, it says "Baby Birth Agreement" and the fine print below reads "pregnancy verification form".

The signature at the end of the document resembles one used by US talk show host Oprah Winfrey.

The scammers kept him interested by sending him photos of "seven-eight women", asking him to choose the one he would like to impregnate. "They said they would book a hotel room in the town where I lived and I would meet the woman there," he said.

When Mangesh kept asking for the promised money, they sent him a receipt saying they had credited his bank account with 512,400 rupees but the money was on hold and would be paid after he'd paid 12,600 as income tax.

By then, Mangesh says, he had lost an entire month's salary and told them that he couldn't pay any more and asked for a refund.

"But Sandeep sir refused and when I got angry, he told me that since my bank account showed a credit of 500,000 rupees, income-tax authorities would raid my home and arrest me.

According to DSP Anand, the men behind the scam are educated - some are even graduates - and they know how to work mobile phones, laptops and printers. The victims, on the other hand, are from all over India and most have little education.

Mangesh says it didn't strike him that this could be a con because "Sandeep sir" had sent him copies of his identity cards, including one which identified him as an Indian army soldier. He also believed that the display photo on the caller's WhatsApp - showing an attractive foreign woman cradling a newborn in her arms - was genuine.

"You tell me how can you not believe that photo?" he asks.

Police have arrested eight men, seized nine mobile phones and a printer, and are looking for 18 others who are absconding.

The problem is, cyber law expert Pavan Duggal explains, that people in India, "are by and large very trusting and rarely do an independent verification of information on the internet", bolstered by an overconfidence in their safety.However, the methodology of the scam in Nawada, he says, "is very novel"."The scammers lured them with promise of free money and free sex which is a deadly combination. In situations like these, prudence often takes a backseat."

But with the advent of Covid-19 - when cellular and net banking became the norm - Mr Duggal says "the golden age of cyber crime began" and warns that "it will go on for decades".

As cyber criminals come up with newer, innovative and more customised offerings, India will have to work harder to protect people like Mangesh from falling prey to scammers, he adds.

"The numbers are overwhelming. And depending on the government alone will take a very long time and the Indian economy will continue to bleed. So the government must give incentives to the private sector to pitch in," he says.

—BBC News

Equador declares war on gangs after TV attack

Masked gunmen storm TV studio as gang attacks in country escalate

QUITO, 10 JAN

Ecuador's President has ordered that criminal gangs be "neutralised" after days of violence culminated in an attack on a television studio.

Masked gunmen broke into public television channel TC's live studio during a broadcast, forcing staff to the floor. Police made 13 arrests following the attack, which injured two employees. At least 10 people have been killed since a 60-day state of emergency began in Ecuador on Monday. The emergency was declared after a notorious gangster vanished from his prison cell. It is unclear whether the incident at the TV studio in Guayaquil was related to the disappearance from a prison in the same city of the boss of the Choneros gang, Adolfo Macías Villamar, or Fito as he is better known.

President Noboa said on Tuesday that an "internal armed conflict" now existed in the country and he was mobilising the armed forces to carry out "military operations to neutralise" what he called "transnational organised crime, terrorist organisations and belligerent non-state actors".

In neighbouring Peru, the government ordered the immediate deployment of a police force to the border to prevent any instability spilling over into the country. The US has said it condemns the "brazen attacks" in Ecuador and is "co-ordinating closely" with President Daniel Noboa and his Ecuadorean government and stands "ready to provide assistance".

Ecuador is one of the world's top banana exporters, but also exports oil, coffee, cocoa, shrimps and fish products. A surge in violence in the Andean nation, inside and outside its prisons, has been linked to fighting between drug cartels, both foreign and local, over control of cocaine routes to the US and Europe.

During Tuesday's assault at the TV station, one gunman pointed a pump-action shotgun at the head of one of the captives, who was also threatened with a revolver. A woman could be heard pleading, "Don't shoot, please don't shoot," AFP news agency reports, while a person could be heard screaming in apparent pain. "Please, they came in to kill us," a TC employee told AFP in a WhatsApp message. "God don't let this happen. The criminals are on air." One cameraman was shot in the leg, and another's arm was broken in the attack, the deputy director of news said.

"Through our earpieces the producers told us, 'Be careful, they are trying to enter, they are stealing, they are mugging us'," Jorge Rendon told the Reuters news agency. "The doors in the studio are very thick, almost bullet-proofed, and they were trying to get in because they wanted to gain access to the studio so we would say whatever they wanted us to say," he said.

—BBC News

Armed men have broken into the set of a public television channel in Ecuador as it broadcast live and threatened people **PHOTO: X/EMERGENCIASEC**

More than 200 people died since Japan's NY's quakes

TOKYO, 10 JAN

As of Wednesday, 203 deaths were reported following the 7.6 magnitude quake that slammed the western coastline of Japan on New Year's. Seven of them were at evacuation centers, where rescued people died from injuries and sickness. Such deaths weren't directly caused by the quakes, fires and mudslides. They happened in alleged safety. "The pressures and stress of living in a place you aren't used to lead to such deaths," said Shigeru Nishimori, a disaster official at Ishikawa Prefecture, the hardest hit region. Nearly 30,000 people whose homes were destroyed or deemed unsafe were staying at schools and other makeshift facilities. Even minor rain and snow can set off landslides where the ground is loose from the more than 1,000 aftershocks that rattled the region for more than a week. Half-collapsed homes might flatten. *—AP*

Unsealing of Jeffrey Epstein documents concludes

NEW YORK, 10 JAN

A final round of legal documents released Tuesday in a court case related to Jeffrey Epstein's sexual abuse of teenage girls was made up of testimony transcripts that were already largely public and dealt with allegations about misconduct by several rich and influential men whose names have been known for a decade or more. The unsealed files included a 2016 deposition of Virginia Giuffre, a woman who said Epstein sexually abused her and arranged for her to have sexual encounters with men including Britain's Prince Andrew starting when she was 17. It also included a transcript of testimony by Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's former girlfriend, who insisted that Giuffre was a liar.*—AP*

PHOTO: AP

Austin undergoes surgery, Biden wasn't informed

NEW YORK, 10 JAN

US Secretary of Defence Lloyd J Austin has been diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent surgery last month and this information was not disclosed to US President Joe Biden, the Pentagon has acknowledged. A statement from Trauma Medical Director Dr John Maddox and Center for Prostate Disease Research of the Murtha Cancer Center Director Dr Gregory Chesnut at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center said that Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer early last month. On 22 December, 2023, after consultation with his medical team, the 70-year-old retired four-star general was admitted to the medical centre where he underwent a minimally invasive surgical procedure called a prostatectomy to treat and cure prostate cancer. *—PTI*

Boeing admits mistake over plane door blow-out

WASHINGTON, 10 JAN

The boss of Boeing has admitted the planemaker was at fault after one of its aircraft suffered a door blow-out shortly after take-off in the US. No-one was injured when the unused cabin door broke away from the Alaska Airlines flight from Portland, Oregon on Friday. The US has grounded 171 of the Boeing 737 Max 9 planes since the incident. On Tuesday, Boeing's president and chief executive Dave Calhoun said the firm was "acknowledging our mistake". The door "plug" which fell away from the aircraft weighed 27kg and was used to fill an emergency exit that was built into the plane, but not required by Alaska Airlines. The missing section of the plane was retrieved from the back garden of a Portland teacher, according to the US National Transportation Safety Board. *—BBC News*

China seen as aiming to influence Taiwan's poll

TAIPEI, 10 JAN

- Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu says China's "global objective is that they want to use Taiwan as a test ground. If they are able to successfully shape the results of the Taiwan elections, they will try to apply their tactics on other countries."

Using military threats, diplomatic pressure, fake news and financial inducements for politicians, China is being accused of deploying a broad strategy to influence voters in Taiwan's elections to pick candidates who favor unification.

China's ultimate goal is to take control of the self-governing island democracy, whose high-tech economy supplies key components for computers, cellphones and other electronic devices and ships much of the world's goods out from the Taiwan Strait.

Beijing has long insisted Taiwan is part of China and must be regained, by military force if necessary, regardless of the views of the island's people.

Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu says China's "global objective is that they want to use Taiwan as a test ground. If they are able to successfully shape the results of the Taiwan elections, they will try to apply their tactics on other countries."

China has been sending warships and fighter jets near Taiwan on a near-daily basis in recent years, hoping to intimidate the island's 23 million people and wear down its military, which relies heavily on support from the United States. China has described Saturday's elections as a choice between war and peace. While the numbers of such missions have dropped off slightly in recent days, Taiwan has reported a number of suspicious balloons traveling over the island from China.

The Defense Ministry also sent out an air raid alert via cell phones about a Chinese rocket launch Tuesday that it later amended to describe as the placement of a satellite into space but on an "abnormal trajectory."

It said the alert was justified by the potential threat to civilians on the ground in Taiwan. Previous efforts to intimidate Taiwanese voters with missile launches and direct threats were largely seen as backfiring after the election of China critics in 1996 and 2000.

—AP

PRINCESS ANNE

Britain's Princess Anne, greets after arriving at the Colombo International airport in Sri Lanka. The princess is visiting the country at the request of the Foreign Office and will begin a whistle-stop tour to mark the UK's bilateral relations with the nation, including a meeting later with President Ranil Wickremesinghe and First Lady Maithree Wickremesinghe **PHOTO: AP/PTI**

Imran fails to get relief from court to contest 8 Feb polls

LAHORE, 10 JAN

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Wednesday failed to get any relief from the court to contest next month's general elections.

The appellate tribunals of the Lahore High Court (LHC) upheld the returning officers' (ROs) decision to reject the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's nomination papers for two National Assembly constituencies in the Punjab province of the country.

Pakistan will go to polls on 8 February. Justice Tariq Nadeem and Justice Abul Aziz of the tribunal announced the verdict on Lahore's NA-122 and Mianwali NA-89 seats, respectively. In the 2018 polls, Khan had won both his hometown's seats. "Both judges rejected the appeals of Khan against the Returning Officer's decision observing that he (Khan) was convicted in the Toshakhana (national treasury gifts) case. His conviction is suspended but he is not acquitted in the case thereby he is not eligible to contest the 8 February polls," a court official told PTI.

Imran Khan **PHOTO: AP**

On December 30, the Returning Officer rejected Khan and several other party stalwarts on what the PTI called "flimsy grounds."

Khan, 71, had contended before the tribunals that the conviction of the Toshakhana case has no link with his disqualification under Article 62 (1f) of the Constitution as 'not honest and righteous', therefore, his nomination papers cannot be rejected.

Khan is likely to challenge the decision of the tribunal in the higher court.

PTI Chairman Advocate Gohar Khan said stopping Khan and other main PTI leaders from contesting polls is the worst kind of misuse of authority and abuse of process. "However, we will contest the elections come what may," he said. *—PTI*

Israel taps top legal minds to battle genocide claim

Palestinians look at a damaged residential building after an Israeli strike in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday **PHOTO: AP**

TEL AVIV, 10 JAN

- Israel hopes their expertise will trounce the South African claim that Israel's military campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide and prevent an interim court order to force Israel to stop the fighting

Israel is sending top legal minds, including a Holocaust survivor, to The Hague this week to counter allegations that it is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

The robust engagement with the International Court of Justice is unusual for Israel, which normally considers the United Nations and international tribunals as unfair and biased.

The decision to participate rather than boycott reflects Israeli concerns that the judges could order Israel to halt its war against Hamas and tarnish its image internationally.

"Israel cannot run away from an accusation that is so serious," said Alon Liel, a former director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry and a former Israeli ambassador to South Africa.

Israel, which as one of the parties in the case is entitled to send a judge, has tapped a former Israeli Supreme Court chief justice to join the court's 15 regular members who will rule on the accusation. It has also enlisted a British barrister and lauded international law expert as part of its defense team. Israel hopes their expertise will trounce the South African claim that Israel's military campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide and prevent an interim court order to force Israel to stop the fighting. Israel says halting the war when Hamas' capabilities are intact in many places and with hostages still in its captivity would amount to a Hamas victory.

The genocide charge strikes at the heart of Israel's national identity. The country sees itself as a bulwark of security for Jews after 6 million were killed in the Holocaust. International support for Israel's creation in 1948 was deeply rooted in outrage over Nazi atrocities.

The same year, with Israel's involvement, world powers drew up the convention against genocide in hopes of preventing similar atrocities.

Israel's unprecedented air, ground and sea offensive has killed more than 23,200 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children, according to health officials in Hamas-run Gaza. Israel's military campaign has displaced roughly 85 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million population, many with no homes to return to. More than a quarter of the population is starving. *—PTI*

ISRAELI ARMY SHOT 3 PALESTINIANS, KILLING 1

BEIT RIMA, 10 JAN

Security camera video from a West Bank village shows a young man standing in a central square when he is suddenly shot and drops to the ground. Two others rushing to his aid are also hit, leaving a 17-year-old dead, moments before Israeli military jeeps roll in.

An Associated Press review of the video and interviews with the two wounded survivors showed Israeli soldiers opened fire on the three when they did not appear to pose a threat. One of the wounded Palestinians was shot a second time after he got up and tried to hop away.

The fatal shooting in the village of Beit Rima last week is the latest in a series of incidents in which soldiers appeared to fire without provocation, a trend Palestinians say has worsened since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza three months ago. *—AP*

Zelenskyy heads to Baltic nations for more support

KYIV, 10 JAN

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived on Wednesday in Lithuania ahead of visits to Estonia and Latvia, as Ukraine seeks more help to bolster its air defences amid Russia's intensified missile and drone onslaughts in the latest development of the 22-month war

The focus of the Baltic trip, Zelenskyy said on his official Telegram channel, will be security concerns, Ukraine's hopes to join the European Union and NATO, and building partnerships in drone production and electronic warfare capacities. The small countries on the Baltic Sea are among Ukraine's staunchest political, financial and military supporters.

They have pushed Kyiv's other Western allies to provide increasingly sophisticated weapons since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Russia's belligerence toward its neighbour Ukraine has some in the Baltics worried that they could be Moscow's next target.

Three countries were seized and annexed by Josef Stalin during World War II before gaining independence again with the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. Zelenskyy, in his Telegram message, expressed gratitude for their "uncompromising" support of Ukraine over the past 10 years, referring to 2014 when Russia's aggression started with the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

Russia's recent escalation of missile and drone attacks is stretching Ukraine's air defense resources, a Ukrainian air force official said Tuesday, leaving the country vulnerable unless it can secure further weapons supplies. *—AP*

INDIA-MALDIVES ROW

Maldives Prez meets Xi Jinping

BEIJING, 10 JAN

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday held talks with his Maldivian counterpart Mohamed Muizzu, who is on a five-day state visit, amid a diplomatic row with India over derogatory remarks by his ministers against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

President Muizzu was accorded a red carpet welcome and a 21-gun salute. Official media reported that Xi and Muizzu held talks, without sharing the details.

Muizzu, who is regarded as a pro-China leader, is visiting China amid the row with India after some Maldivian ministers posted derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Modi leading to a spate of cancellations of reservations by Indian tourists, who constitute the largest number of visitors to the tourism-dependent island nation.

Besides talks with Xi, Muizzu is expected to meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang and other senior officials before his return to Male on 12 January. Muizzu reached Beijing last night after staying in the Chinese city of Fujian for two days.

In his address to the Maldives Business Forum in Fujian Province on Tuesday, Muizzu appealed to China to "intensify" efforts to send more tourists to his country.

"China was our (Maldives') number one market (for tourism) pre-Covid, and it is my request that we intensify efforts for China to regain this position," he said.

His appeal for more Chinese tourists came amid a diplomatic row with India.

Muizzu's government suspended three deputy ministers for their derogatory posts on social media. Also, the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) strongly condemned the derogatory comments. *—PTI*

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, First Lady Sajidha Mohamed visit Communist Party Museum in China, Wednesday **PHOTO: AP**

N Korean leader Kim calls S Korea 'principal enemy'

SEOUL, 10 JAN

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called South Korea "our principal enemy" and threatened to annihilate it if provoked, as he escalates his inflammatory rhetoric in an election year in South Korea and the US.

The White House meanwhile said it has evidence that Russia had fired at Ukraine additional ballistic missiles provided by North Korea. The US, South Korea and their partners issued a statement Wednesday condemning both North Korea and Russia over the missile transfer. Experts say Kim will likely further raise animosities by test-firing more missiles to try to raise stakes in the standoff with his rivals and influence the results of South Korea's parliamentary elections in April and the US presidential election in November.

Kim Jong Un **PHOTO: AP**

During tours of munitions factories this week, Kim said it's time to define South Korea "as a state most hostile" toward North Korea because of its long-running attempts to topple the North's socialist system. He said North Korea must bolster its nuclear war deterrent, the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported Wednesday.

If South Korea dares to use its military force against North Korea, Kim said, "We will have no hesitation in annihilating (South Korea) by mobilising all means and forces in our hands," according to KCNA. He has made similar threats recently, and analysts say Kim likely hopes that South Korea's liberal opposition, which is seeking reconciliation with North Korea, would win the April elections. Kim apparently also believes he can win US concessions if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House, analysts said. Kim and Trump met three times as part of high-stakes nuclear diplomacy in 2018-19. *—AP*

Maruti to invest ₹35K cr for 2nd plant in Gujarat

The plant would have production capacity of 10L units per annum

GANDHINAGAR, 10 JAN

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) will invest Rs 35,000 crore to set up its second manufacturing facility in Gujarat as it looks to ramp up annual production capacity to over 40 lakh units by 2030-31, Suzuki Motor Corporation President Toshihiro Suzuki said on Wednesday.

Speaking here at the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit (VGGS), Suzuki said the plant would have an installed production capacity of 10 lakh units per annum.

"We will invest Rs 35,000 crore for the construction of a second car plant in Gujarat which would produce another one million units per year," Suzuki said.

The new plant is expected to start operation in FY2028-29. Details of location and the models to be produced will be shared in due course.

As a result, the annual production capacity in Gujarat will be 2 million (20 lakh) units -- 10 lakh units at Suzuki Motor Gujarat and 10 lakh units at the second new plant, he added.

Japanese auto major Suzuki Motor Corporation has around 58 per cent stake in MSI.

Suzuki noted that under the strong leadership and consistent support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for manufacturing industries, the Indian automobile market has been expanding steadily.

As a result, India has become the third largest automobile market in the world, he noted.

"We have also scaled up production capacity substantially in India.

It is noteworthy that as compared to 10 years ago, we expect 1.7 times in vehicle production and 2.6 times in export sales in the current fiscal year," Suzuki said.

He stated that the first battery electric vehicle (BEV) from the Suzuki Group will be rolled out from Suzuki Motor Gujarat by the end of this year.

This will increase the annual production capacity of Suzuki Motor Gujarat from the current 7.5 lakh to 10 lakh units, he noted.

The fourth line is expected to start operation from FY2026-27

Suzuki noted that as far as reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is concerned, the group will focus on a multi-pathway approach.

Together with the National Dairy Development Board, and Banas Dairy, Suzuki has already started construction of four biogas plants in Gujarat, Suzuki said.

Suzuki Group will always work to provide a variety of sustainable customer-oriented mobility options, he added. *—PTI*

The new plant is expected to start operation in FY2028-29. Details of location and the models to be produced will be shared in due course *PHOTO: X*

- Suzuki noted that as far as reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is concerned, the group will focus on a multi-pathway approach

Rupee jumps 11 paise to settle at 83.02 against dollar

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Rising for the sixth straight session, the rupee jumped 11 paise at 83.02 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a firm trend in equity markets and easing crude prices.A weak greenback overseas and expectations of favourable global and domestic macroeconomic data also boosted the domestic currency, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.13 and traded between the peak of 82.97 and the lowest level of 83.18 against the greenback during the session.It finally settled at 83.02 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 11 paise from its previous close.The domestic currency settled 1 paisa higher at 83.13 on Tuesday.

AnujChoudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee appreciated following recovery in the domestic markets and a soft US dollar. A slight decline in crude oil prices also supported the rupee. *—PTI*

Gold falls ₹50; silver declines ₹450

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 63,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous close, the precious metal had closed at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams.Silver also declined Rs 450 to Rs 76,300 per kilogram."Gold traded slightly lower on Wednesday, with spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets trading at Rs 63,150/10 gram, down Rs 50 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.Meanwhile, in the futures trade on the MCX, February contract of gold rose Rs 86 to Rs 62,265 per 10 grams. Also, March contract of silver jumped Rs 243 to Rs 72,290 per kg on the bourse.In the international markets, gold and silver were down at USD 2,030 per ounce and USD 23.04 per ounce,respectively.Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,030 per ounce, down USD 1 from the previous close in the global markets. *—PTI*

Radisson Group opens hotel in Ayodhya

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Radisson Hotel Group on Wednesday announced the opening of its hotel in Ayodhya, ahead of the inauguration of Ram Temple in the city on January 22 which is expected to boost religious tourism.The 80-key hotel, Park Inn by Radisson Ayodhya, offers proximity to notable landmarks such as the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, The Hanuman Garhi Temple, and SitakiRasoi, among others, it stated."We are pleased to have an early mover's advantage with the opening of our newest hotel in the sacred city of Ayodhya. With its rich cultural heritage and historical landmarks, Ayodhya holds a special place in the heart of our country. This expansion is a testament to our commitment to providing exceptional hospitality experiences across top tier 2 and tier 3 cities in India," said K B Kachru, Chairman Emeritus and Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group.*—PTI*

BL Finance Limited's ₹33.41 cr IPO opens

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of IBL Finance Limited, a leading fintech-based financial services platform, opened on 9 January. The company has fixed a price of Rs. 51 per share for the IPO, which will close on 11 January. The minimum lot size for an application is 2000 shares.Incorporated in August 2017, It is a platform that uses technology and data science to make lending easier and faster. IBL Finance is a mobile app offering instant personal loans up to Rs. 50,000 through digital process. *—PTI*

India to be a $5 T economy by FY28; reach $30 T by 2047: FM

GANDHINAGAR, 10 JAN

India will become the third largest economy by 2027-28, with a GDP of over USD 5 trillion, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Wednesday.

Even going by conservative estimates, the size of the Indian economy will be USD 30 trillion by 2047, she noted.

"It is possible that we will be the third largest economy by 2027-28, and our GDP will cross USD 5 trillion by that time. By 2047, it is a conservative estimate that we will reach at least USD 30 trillion in terms of economy," Sitharaman said at the Vibrant Gujarat summit.

India, with a GDP of roughly USD 3.4 trillion, is currently the fifth largest economy in the world, after the US, China, Japan and Germany.

Indian economy is projected to grow by 7.3 per cent in the current fiscal, higher than 7.2 per cent in 2022-23.

Sitharaman said India has received USD 919 billion in foreign direct investment in 23 years till 2023. Of this, 65 per cent, or USD 595 billion, came in the last 8-9 years of the Narendra Modi government.Referring to financial inclusion, the minister said the number of people with bank accounts has increased from 15 crore in 2014 to 50 crore at present. *—PTI*

Sitharaman said India has received USD 919 billion in foreign direct investment in 23 years till 2023 *PHOTO: PTI*

Paytm plans to invest ₹100 cr in GIFT City

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Fintech firm One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, plans to invest Rs 100 crore in Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) to build a global financial ecosystem, the company said on Wednesday.

The company will make the investment over a period of time and will seek requisite approvals for the same.

"GIFT City is set to become a global financial hub, further putting India on the world map for innovation. The strategic investment in GIFT City represents a pivotal step towards building an Artificial Intelligence-driven cross-border remittance and payments technology landscape, presenting global opportunities. This will enable us to deliver fast, reliable, and cost-effective remittance solutions, reducing friction, at a global scale," One97 Communications Founder and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma said in a statement.

With GIFT city as an ideal innovation hub for cross-border activity, Paytm will use its proven capability to innovate and build new tech for users across the globe looking to invest in India. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Modi greatest global leader, says Ambani

GANDHINAGAR, 10 JAN

Narendra Modi is India's most successful Prime Minister and the greatest global leader of current generation, billionaire MukeshAmbani said on Wednesday as he flaunted his group Reliance Industries' Gujarati heritage and its over USD 150 billion (Rs 12 lakh crore) investment in last 10 years.With Prime Minister Modi on the dias, Ambani termed the biennial Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit -- which was conceived when Modi was chief minister of the state two decades back -- as "the most prestigious investor summit in the world".

"Our beloved leader who has emerged as the greatest global leader of our times. And he is Shri Narendrabhai Modi, the most successful Prime Minister in India's history," said the head of India's most valuable company Reliance Industries Ltd.He went on to state that when Modi speaks, the whole world not only listens but applauds.

Ambani said, "I am a proud Gujarati" and "Reliance was, is, and will always remain a Gujarati company.." *—PTI*

Mukesh Ambani *PHOTO: REUTERS*

World's largest single location steel plant in Guj soon

GANDHINAGAR, 10 JAN

Lakshmi Mittal on Wednesday announced that ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) is building the world's largest single location integrated steel plant at Gujarat's Hazira.

Mittal, the executive chairman of global steel major ArcelorMittal which operates the JV in India with Japan's Nippon, said the plant will have a capacity of producing 24 million tonne of crude steel, and should be ready by 2029.

Speaking at the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit here, Mittal said the company has signed an agreement for the second phase of the plant with the Gujarat government at the event. *—PTI*

Semiconductor fab to come up in Guj: Tata

GANDHINAGAR, 10 JAN

Tata Group is planning to build a huge semiconductor fab in Gujarat's Dholera, and it will begin operations in 2024 itself, Chairman N Chandrasekaran said on Wednesday.He said the salt-to-software group is in the final stages of negotiations for the plant.

"Tata Group has also made a commitment, and is on the verge of concluding and announcing a huge semiconductor fab in Dholera, and we are about to complete these negotiations and start in 2024," Chandrasekaran said at the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit here.The chairman also said the group will begin construction of a 20 gigawatt lithium ion storage battery factory in the state's Sanand city in the next two months.

Chandrasekaran said in the recent past, the group has made a "significant commitment" to expand its presence in Sanand, which, he said is becoming a home for all of the group's electric vehicle technology.The expansion has been undertaken to meet the growing demand for EVs, he added. They are building the C295 defence aircraft in Vadodara and will start manufacturing it at Dholera, Chandrasekaran said. *—PTI*

N Chandrasekaran *PHOTO: PTI*

OWING TO LATE BUYING

NTPC, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, Infosys and Nestle were the major laggards *PHOTO: PTI*

Sensex jumps 270 points; RIL, ICICI Bank shine

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty bounced back from intra-day lows to settle higher on Wednesday, supported by a fag-end buying in market heavyweights Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank.

After a muted opening, the BSE benchmark swung between gains and losses before settling 271.50 points or 0.38 per cent higher at 71,657.71. The index hit a low of 71,110.98 and a high of 71,733.84 during the session.

The Nifty advanced 73.85 points or 0.34 per cent to 21,618.70.

"The weakness in global indices continued to weigh down the domestic indices with every up move. The market is looking for fresh triggers for a direction, and the release of US and Indian inflation data may provide a near-term direction in the market.

"The investor's focus will be shifted to the earnings season, on a sequential basis, the earnings growth is likely to be lower, while the expectations for auto, capital goods, and cement will remain strong," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Reliance Industries was the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 2.69 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors, Wipro, IndusInd Bank, JSW Steel, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services and Titan.

In contrast, NTPC, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, Infosys and Nestle were the major laggards.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the green while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended mostly lower on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 990.90 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.19 per cent to USD 77.44 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark ended marginally higher by 30.99 points or 0.04 per cent at 71,386.21 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended 31.85 points or 0.15 per cent up at 21,544.85. *—PTI*

CBI alleged that Siemens Group provided the faulty feasibility report for installation of the wind power plant *PHOTO: PTI*

FIR against Siemens Group

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The CBI has booked Chennai-based Siemens Gamesa Renewable Power and three retired officials of SJVN, among others, for allegedly causing aRs 191-crore loss to the PSU because of irregularities in the installation of its wind power plant in Ahmednagar, officials said on Wednesday.

The agency has booked three retired senior officers -- RK Agarwal (executive director), Sanjay Uppal (chief general manager) and AK Jindal (deputy general manager) -- of SJVN Limited (earlier known as Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam), besides Power and Energy Consultants representatives Vineet Sharma and CM Jain and Chennai-based Gamesa Wind Turbines Private Limited (now known as Siemens Gamesa Renewable Power Private Limited), they said.

Queries seeking a reaction from Siemens Gamesa Renewable Power remained unanswered.

After registering the FIR, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted searches at seven places in Delhi, Ghaziabad, Gurugram, Samana in Punjab's Patiala district and Chennai, on the premises of the accused, leading to recovery of certain documents.

The CBI has alleged that Power and Energy Consultants provided the faulty feasibility report for installation of the wind power plant. *—PTI*

STARTING FROM JUNE

India to back EU's efforts for paperless customs system

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Indian exporting firms need to gear themselves up to comply with new EU norms as the European Union is moving towards a paperless customs process from 3 June this year.

Indian export firms to comply with EU norms moving towards paperless customs

The development assumes significance for domestic exporters as the European Union (EU) accounts for about 17 per cent of India's total merchandise exports. In 2022-23, India exported goods worth Rs 6,22,912 crore ($75 billion) to EU as against the country's total exports of Rs 37,45,672 crore ($451 billion) in that financial year.

The EU has proposed to implement the second phase of its Import Control System (ICS) from June 3 this year. ICSD 1 was applicable to the air mail and express deliveries from March 15, 2021, and then it was extended to air cargo from March last year.

The 'ICS2' will now be extended to cover all type of imports using ships, trains, trucks also on June 3, 2024. First two phases covered 15 per cent imports into the EU, third and final phase cover balance 85 per cent of the imports by value.

According to a European Commission release, economic operators carrying goods by sea, inland waterways, road and rail will have to submit a complete Entry Summary Declaration (ENS) dataset to ICS2.

The new system will apply to all goods, including physical goods like manufactured products, raw materials, agricultural products, and even live animals. It will also apply to letters, parcels, and express deliveries.

The new system enables the EU to move towards a paperless and risk-based import compliance. It eliminates the need for paper declarations for most goods and simplifies the customs clearance process based on risk assessment.

Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said, "The Indian exporters, EU-based importers and carriers will now be required to submit data electronically through the ICS2 system, replacing older paper-based declarations."

It added that the new system is streamlining the customs clearance process by eliminating the need for physical paperwork at borders.

Paper documents may be required only for a small category of specific types of goods or certain trade lanes. Also, while the EU customs goes digital, it recognises that international trade might still involve paper documents, like bills of lading or commercial invoices, it said. *—PTI*

The new system will apply to all goods, including physical goods like manufactured products, raw materials *PHOTO: PTI*

- Indian exporting firms need to gear themselves up to comply with new EU norms as the European Union is moving towards a paperless customs process from June 3 this year.Indian export firms to comply with EU norms moving towards paperless customsThe development assumes significance for domestic exporters as the European Union (EU) accounts for about 17 per cent of India's total merchandise exports

PHOTO: PTI

Rashid Khan ruled out of India series

MOHALI, 10 JAN

Afghanistan will be without their trump card Rashid Khan in the T20 series against India starting here on Thursday but skipper Ibrahim Zadran was upbeat about the team's chances in their strongest format. The celebrated spinner, who underwent back surgery after the ODI World Cup in November, has been named in the squad but will not be available for the three games as he undergoes his rehab."He is not fit. He is doing his rehab. We will miss him in the series. Without Rashid there are a few players we trust," said Zadran in the pre-match press conference.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Ankita Raina lone Indian to receive direct entry

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Asian Games bronze-medallist Ankita Raina is the only Indian to have received a direct entry in the upcoming ITF Women's Open, set to be hosted by the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association here from 14 January.Runner-up from the last edition and ranked 208th in singles, she features in the main draw list that has 20 direct entries, along with four wild cards and eight qualifiers. As for the Indians, there could be as many as nine of them in the singles main draw. —*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

No animosity with Harmanpreet: Alyssa Healy

NAVI MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Australia women's team captain Alyssa Healy has rubbished talks about animosity building up between her and India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, saying they were just playing "competitive cricket". India registered their maiden Test win against Australia at the Wankhede Stadium before the visitors came back strongly to win the ODIs 3-0 and T20Is 2-1 in a highly competitive month-long series."I would probably just summarise it to competitive cricket is going out there, doing our job for the side," said Alyssa, following the seven-wicket win in the third T20I at the DY Patil Stadium on Tuesday, which helped Australia take the series 2-1.—*PTI*

Adams was named NZ bowling coach for Pakistan

AUCKLAND, 10 JAN

Former New Zealand international Andre Adams will join the Blackcaps support staff for the home T20I series against Pakistan beginning 12 January. Adams will work as bowling coach for the five-match series as part of head coach Gary Stead's coaching group, which also features regular batting coach Luke Ronchi.The decision follows Adams' work as pace-bowling coach for the New Zealand women's team during the side's 2023 tour to South Africa.New Zealand Strength and Conditioning Coach Chris Donaldson and Team Performance Manager Simon Insley will both take a break during the series against Pakistan with their roles being filled by Matt Long and Dave Meiring respectively. —*PTI*

Spotlight on Rohit, Kohli in India v/s Afghanistan white-ball series

Kohli to miss first T20I due to personal reasons: Dravid

MOHALI, 10 JAN

The return of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to the T20 format after 14 months will be keenly observed when India faces a dangerous Afghanistan in the first-ever white-ball series between the two teams, beginning here on Thursday.

The three-match contest will be India's last before the T20 World Cup in June, giving the team more clarity on where it stands ahead of the ICC event in the Americas.

However, the final 15 will be picked on the core group's performance in the IPL, which precedes the World Cup.

Rohit and Kohli, now that they are back in the T20 setup, are a certainty in that squad but the accomplished duo would first like to get the most out of the games against Afghanistan, who would be without their star spinner Rashid Khan.

Khan underwent back surgery in November last year and is still recuperating.

"He is not totally fit. We will miss him in the series. We will struggle without Rashid but one should be ready for any kind of situation," Afghanistan captain Ibrahim Zadran said in the pre-match press conference here, hoping that others in the side would step up.

Indian captain Rohit Sharma during a practice session ahead of the first T20I cricket match against Afghanistan, in Mohali **PHOTO: PTI**

1st T20I

Matches won	Matches won
INDIA	AFGHANISTAN
4	0
No Result 1	Match starts at 7.00 PM IST

India's star batter Virat Kohli will miss the first T20 International against Afghanistan owing to "personal reasons", head coach Rahul Dravid said here on Wednesday. Media reports claimed that Shreyas Iyer has missed out on the Afghanistan T20I series as BCCI had taken disciplinary action on him, but India head coach Rahul Dravid has quashed the rumours.
"Shreyas Iyer missed out due to lots of batters in the mix - no disciplinary actions, these are fake (news reports)," said Dravid.

The focus, however, will firmly be on the two India greats, easily among the biggest crowd-pullers. Their presence on the field would be a big reason for the Mohali crowd to brave the prevailing cold wave.

Rohit, who will also captain the side, will be expected to carry on with his ultra-aggressive approach in the powerplay like he showed in the ODI World Cup. Kohli, on the other hand, will look to up his strike rate in the middle overs as the modern game doesn't have room for anchors anymore. —*PTI*

Elavenil Valarivan, Nancy Mandhotra, and Mehuli Ghosh after winning women's 10m air rifle team gold, beating Singapore, at Asian Olympic Qualifiers. **PHOTO: AP**

Shooters Nancy and Elavenil win air rifle gold

JAKARTA, 10 JAN

Budding shooter Nancy and Olympian Elavenil Valarivan came up with a grand performance in women's 10m air rifle, clinching gold and silver respectively at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers here on Wednesday.

Teenager Nancy, the junior world team champion, shot a superb 252.8 in the final field of eight to clinch the top spot.

Compatriot Elavenil was unlucky to miss the gold by a fraction of a point, aggregating 252.7. India narrowly missed a clean sweep in the women's 10m air rifle final after Mehuli Ghosh finished fourth with 210 points behind China's Shen Yufan.

India's world champion marksman Rudrankksh Patil settled for a bronze medal in men's 10m air rifle shooting 228.7 in the final, which was won by Ma Sihan of China (251.4), while Korea's Daehan Choe bagged silver. Another Indian to make the final, Arjun Babuta, finished sixth.Rudrankksh had qualified for the eight-shooter final and placed third with a score of 630.4, while Babuta (629.6) was fourth going into the medal round.Nancy was consistent throughout the final, not having a single below-par score, while Elavenil was unlucky to score a 9.7 in her 10th shot in the final. —*PTI*

Djokovic and Swiatek confirmed as top seeds

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2024

PARIS, 10 JAN

Novak Djokovic and Iga Swiatek will be the top seeds in men's and women's singles, respectively at this year's Australian Open, the tournament organisers confirmed on Wednesday.

This year's Australian Open will be held from 14 to 28 January.

World No. 1 and 10-time winner Djokovic leads the men's field followed by Carlos Alcaraz, who missed last year's edition due to an injury. As the top seed in Melbourne, Djokovic has a 42-0 win-loss record.

Russia's Daniil Medvedev, two-time runner-up, and Italy's Jannik Sinner have been seeded third and fourth respectively and Thursday's draw ceremony will decide in which half of the draw will fall.

In women's singles, defending champion Aryna Sabalenka is the second seed behind World No. 1 Swiatek while last year's runner-up Elena Rybakina and reigning US Open champion Coco Gauff are third and fourth seeds, respectively. —*AP*

Novak Djokovic and Iga Swiatek will be the top seeds in men's and women's singles, respectively at this year's Australian Open, the tournament organisers confirmed on Wednesday **PHOTO:X**

- This year's Australian Open will be held from 14 to 28 JanuaryWorld No. 1 and 10-time winner Djokovic leads the men's field followed by Carlos Alcaraz, who missed last year's edition due to an injury.

India shares top honors with SA in U-19 Tri-Nation tourney

JOHANNESBURG, 10 JAN

The Uday Saharan-led Indian Colts shared the top honors with their South African counterparts in the Tri-Nation Under-19 Tournament after the title clash was called off due to rain here on Wednesday.

The match officials waited for the designated cut-off time to allow a minimum of 20 overs for a result to be achieved.

But because of the wet playing conditions, the final at the Old Edwardians Cricket Ground Club was abandoned without a ball being bowled.With no reserve day, the prize was shared between both teams. Five-time champions India will now shift their focus on the U-19 World Cup beginning on 19 January.

The Indian side will face Australia in their U-19 World Cup warm-up fixture at Pretoria on Saturday. They have a second warm-up fixture against Sri Lanka on 17 January.

Tri-Nation Under-19 Tournament after the title clash was called off due to rain here on Wednesday **PHOTO: AP**

In the tournament proper, five-time champions India played against Bangladesh. The Indian Colts made the Tri-Nation final by winning all their four group league matches.Saharan and Adarsh Singh have struck a century each to form the backbone of their batting.While Saharan had 117 runs in three innings, Adarsh finished as the top run-getter of the series with 230 runs.The Proteas U-19 side on the other hand made the final by their better net run-rate over Afghanistan.Having lost to the Afghans in their opener, South Africa bounced back to defeat them in the last game. —*PTI*

Munich to hold Beckenbauer commemoration in stadium

LONDON, 10 JAN

Bundesliga champion Bayern Munich will hold a commemoration of Germany great Franz Beckenbauer inside its Allianz Arena on January 19 for fans to be able to take part, the club said on Wednesday. Beckenbauer, who died on Sunday aged 78, was Germany's first truly global sports star, leading it to the World Cup title as player and coach in 1974 and 1990 respectively, and becoming part of the country's social fabric in a hugely successful 50-year career on and off the pitch.Beckenbauer considered one of the best players of all time, won 103 caps and captained West Germany to World Cup success in 1974, two years after lifting the European title. He was also part of the mighty Bayern Munich team which won three consecutive European Cups from 1974-76 among other titles, —*AP*

Sasikumar enters ITF Mandya Open pre-quarters

MANDYA, 10 JAN

Fourth-seed Indian Sasikumar Mukund and talented youngster Karan Singh registered contrasting wins to make the men's singles pre-quarterfinals of the ITF Mandya Open here on Wednesday.

The 20-year-old Karan scripted a fighting 3-6 6-3 6-2 over seventh seed Tsung-Hao Huang of Taipei, while Mukund beat compatriot Kabir Hans 6-3 6-4.However, it was heartbreak for the newest face in the Indian Davis Cup team and local favorite SD Prajwal Dev.

The eighth seed squandered three match points in the final set to go down to Yunseok Jang of Korea 2-6 7-5 5-7 in a match lasting over three hours.The last three matches of the day were stopped half-way owing to bad light.

Results (Round of 32, Indian unless mentioned):. Men's Singles: Yunseok Jang (KOR) beat 8-SD Prajwal Dev 6-2 5-7 7-5; 5-Nam Hoang Ly (VIE) beat Ranjeet Virali-Murugesan 6-2 6-3; 4-Sasikumar Mukund beat Kabir Hans 6-3 6-4; Mitsuki Wei Kang Leong (MAS) beat Rishi Reddy 4-6 6-3 7-5; Ofek Shimanov (ISR) beat Shivank Bhatnagar 6-2 6-4; 1-Kris Van Wyk (RSA) beat Faisal Qamar 6-1 7-6 (2); Thijmen Loof (NED) beat 6-M Rifqi Fitriadi (INA) 7-6 (5) 1-6 6-1; 3-Orel Kimhi (ISR) beat Rishab Agarwal 6-3 4-6 6-2; Karan Singh beat 7-Tsung-Hao Huang (TPE) 3-6 6-3 6-2; Vishnu Vardhan beat David Pichler (AUT) 6-3 3-6 6-4; Madhwin Kamath beat Grigoriy Lomakin (KAZ) 6-3 7-6 (6); Manish Sureshkumar vs 2-Giles Hussey (GBR) 6-7 (4) (interrupted); Siddhant Banthia vs Jelle Sels (NED) 4-6 (interrupted); Ishaque Eqbal vs Matt Hulme (AUS) 7-6 (4) 2-2 (interrupted). —*PTI*

Sasikumar **PHOTO: PTI**

- Fourth-seed Indian Sasikumar Mukund and talented youngster Karan Singh registered contrasting wins to make the men's singles pre-quarterfinals of the ITF Mandya Open here on Wednesday.

Avani Prashanth shoots day's best score and rises to second place

MELBOURNE, 10 JAN

Avani Prashanth cherished hat-tricks of birdies on both nines to card the day's best score of 5-under 68, which propelled her to the second place on the leaderboard after the second round of the Australian Masters of Amateurs.

Avani (71-68), who dropped four shots late in the first round, had seven birdies against two bogeys and she is now 7-under for 36, just one stroke behind the leader, Japan's Nika Ito (68-70) at the Par-73 South Golf Club.

Avani, ranked 50th in the World amateur rankings, has one more round to go to make a bid for one of the most prestigious amateur titles in the region.

The 2023 Queen Sirikit Cup winner birdied the third, fourth and fifth and then birdied the 10th, 11th and 12th and at that stage, she was 6-under for the day.

She dropped shots on the 13th and 18th but in between had a birdie on the 17th, which she had bogeyed on Day 1.India's other players were once again struggling as Heena Kang (83-85) was 69th among women. —*PTI*

Avani Prashanth cherished hat-tricks of birdies **PHOTO: AP**

MALAYSIA OPEN

Satwik-Chirag advances, Prannoy loses

KUALA LUMPUR, 10 JAN

The Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty began the new season on a winning note, advancing to the second round, while Asian Games bronze medallist HS Prannoy bit the dust in his opening-round match at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

The world No.2 doubles combination of Satwik and Chirag overcame a tough challenge from the gritty Indonesian pair of Muhammad Shohibul Fikri and Maulana Bagas 21-18, 21-19, while world No. 8 Prannoy lost to Denmark's Anders Antonsen, a player ranked one spot below him, 14-21, 11-21 in 43 minutes.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty at the 19th Asian Games, in Hangzhou **PHOTO: PTI**

The second-seeded pair of Satwik and Chirag, which reached the semifinals in 2023, will look to continue the good run and go deep in the draw after the stiff 44-minute test from the world No. 9 duo, which had beaten the Indians twice last year -- at the Thailand Open and China Open.

Satwik and Chirag have looked in ominous form, winning the Asian Games gold in Hangzhou, a Super 1000 crown in Indonesia, the Korea Open Super 500 and the Swiss Open Super 300 last year before grabbing a career-best ranking of World No.1, albeit for a brief time.

The duo asserted early dominance in the first game with powerful smashes to take a four-point lead at 8-4 and never lost the advantage. However, the second game was more challenging with the Indians trailing for most of the match before levelling at 19-all and taking the last two points.

Prannoy, a frontrunner in the Olympic race, had a sensational last season with maiden bronze medals at the World Championships and the Asian Games and a title run at the Malaysia Masters Super 500.

But, in the season-opening match here the Indian looked rusty and couldn't match up with his opponent's speed.

Another Indian, Lakshya Sen, will begin his campaign against Weng Hong Yang of China later in the day. —*PTI*

- The Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty began the new season on a winning note, advancing to the second round, while Asian Games bronze medallist HS Prannoy bit the dust in his opening-round match at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Sandeep Lamichhane jailed for 8 years after being convicted of rape

KATHMANDU, 10 JAN

Nepal spinner Sandeep Lamichhane has been sentenced to eight years in jail by a Kathmandu court after being convicted of rape.

According to Kathmandu Post, the Kathmandu District Court announced the verdict on Wednesday after he was proven guilty of raping an 18-year-old woman.

A single-judge bench also imposed a Rs 3,00,000 fine on the 23-year-old, besides ordering him to pay a compensation of Rs 2,00,000 to the victim. Lamichhane's lawyer Saroj Ghimire was quoted as saying that he "will appeal the decision in a higher court."

In September last year, an arrest warrant was issued by the Kathmandu police for Lamichhane, leading to his suspension as the Nepal captain by the Cricket Association of Nepal.

Although he was playing in the Caribbean Premier League for Jamaica Tallawahs, the franchise released him with immediate effect, as he returned to Kathmandu, where he was arrested.

However, Lamichhane pleaded innocent before his arrest and wrote on Facebook that he would "fully cooperate in all stages of the investigation. —*PTI*

Lamichhane **PHOTO: AP**